

From Movement to Government

The Congress in the United Provinces, 1937–42

VISALAKSHI MENON

SAGE SERIES IN MODERN INDIAN HISTORY

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Sage Series in Modern Indian History-IV

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For
My Parents, Leela and I.K.K. Menon

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Series Editors' Preface

The Sage Series in Modern Indian History is intended to bring together the growing volume of historical studies that share a very broad common historiographic focus.

In the 50 years since independence from colonial rule, research and writing on modern Indian history has given rise to intense debates resulting in the emergence of different schools of thought. Prominent among them are in the Cambridge School and the Subaltern School. Some of us at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, along with many colleagues in other parts of the country, have tried to promote teaching and research along somewhat different lines. We have endeavoured to steer clear of colonial stereotypes, nationalist romanticization, sectarian radicalism and rigid and dogmatic approach. We have also discouraged the "flavour of the month" approach, which tries to ape whatever is currently fashionable.

Of course, a good historian is fully aware of contemporary trends in historical writing and of historical work being done elsewhere, and draws heavily on the comparative approach, i.e., the historical study of other societies, states and nations, and on other disciplines, especially economics, political science, sociology and social anthropology. A historian tries to understand the past and make it relevant to the present and the future. History thus also caters to the changing needs of society and social development. A historian is a creature of his or her times, yet a good historian tries to use every tool available to the historian's craft to avoid a conscious bias to get as near the truth as possible.

The approach we have tried to evolve looks sympathetically, though critically, at the Indian national liberation struggle and

other popular movements such as those of labour, peasants, lower castes, tribal peoples and women. It also looks at colonialism as a structure and a system, and analyzes changes in economy, society and culture in the colonial context as also in the context of independent India. It focuses on communalism and casteism as major features of modern Indian development. The volumes in the series will tend to reflect this approach as also its changing and developing features. At the broadest plane our approach is committed to the Enlightenment values of rationalism, humanism, democracy and secularism.

The series will consist of well-researched volumes with a wider scope which deal with a significant historiographical aspect even while devoting meticulous attention to detail. They will have a firm empirical grounding based on an exhaustive and rigorous examination of primary sources (including those available in archives in different parts of India and often abroad); collections of private and institutional papers; newspapers and journals (including those in Indian languages); oral testimony; pamphlet literature; and contemporary literary works. The books in this series while sharing a broad historiographic approach will invariably have considerable differences in analytical frameworks.

The many problems that hinder academic pursuit in developing societies—e.g., relatively poor library facilities, forcing scholars to run from library and city to city and yet not being able to find many of the necessary books; inadequate institutional support within universities; a paucity of research-funding organizations; a relatively underdeveloped publishing industry, and so on—have plagued historical research and writing as well. All this had made it difficult to initiate and sustain efforts at publishing a series along the lines of the Cambridge History series or the history series of some of the best US and European universities.

But the need is there because, in the absence of such an effort, a vast amount of work on Indian history being done in Delhi and other university centres in India as also in British, US, Russian, Japanese, Australian and European universities which shares a common historiographic approach remains scattered and has no "voice". Also, many fine works published by small Indian publishers never reach the libraries and bookshops in India or abroad.

We are acutely aware that one swallow does not make a summer. This series will only mark the beginning of a new attempt at presenting the efforts of scholars to evolve autonomous (but not indigenist) intellectual approaches in modern Indian history.

Bipan Chandra
Mridula Mukherjee
Aditya Mukherjee

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List of Abbreviations

AICC	All-India Congress Committee
AICSP	All-India Congress Socialist Party
AIKS	All-India Kisan Sabha
AISF	All-India Students Federation
AITUC	All-India Trade Union Congress
AIVIA	All-India Village Industries Association
AMU	Aligarh Muslim University
APZA	Agra Provincial Zamindars' Association
BHU	Benares Hindu University
CCC	City Congress Committee
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CIS	Contributions to Indian Sociology
CLA	Central Legislative Assembly
CLEC	Cawnpore Labour Enquiry Committee
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPI	Communist Party of India
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
CWC	Congress Working Committee
CWMG	Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
CWSVP	Collected Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel
DAV	Dayanand Anglo-Vedic
DCC	District Congress Committee
GAD	General Administration Department
GOI	Government of India
HRA	Hindustan Republican Army
HSD	Hindustani Seva Dal
HSRA	Hindustan Socialist Republican Army
HSS	Harijan Sevak Sangh

IAR	Indian Annual Register
IESHR	Indian Economic and Social History Review
INC	Indian National Congress
JA	Joshi Archives
MAS	Modern Asian Studies
MCC	Mandal Congress Committee
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
NAPA	National Agriculturists' Party of Agra
NAPO	National Agriculturists' Party of Oudh
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
OKS	Oudh Kisan Sabha
PAI UP	Police Abstracts of Intelligence for UP
PCC	Provincial Congress Committee
SIH	Studies in History
SWGBP	Selected Works of Govind Ballabh Pant
SWJN	Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru
TCC	Town Congress Committee
UPCC	United Provinces Congress Committee
UPKC	UP Kisan Committee
UPKS	UP Kisan Sabha
UPLA	UP Legislative Assembly
UPLAD	UP Legislative Assembly Debates
UPLC	UP Legislative Council
UPSA	Uttar Pradesh State Archives

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Last but not the least is the deep debt of gratitude I owe to my family members. For my parents, the completion of this work was a long-cherished dream. My mother, unfortunately, did not live to see the publication of this book. For my father, a writer with many books to his credit, this is only the passing down of a legacy. Antony ungrudgingly set aside his own work and went through innumerable drafts with meticulous care. He has been a continuous source of inspiration and guidance. Sujit and Sameer made several offers to help and cheerfully put up with their mother's impatience on numerous occasions. I hope that some day they will appreciate this work and carry forward the tradition.

As for the errors in this work, if any, I alone can be held responsible.

Introduction

This book began as an attempt to study the first Congress ministry in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (henceforth UP). I was curious about the internal dynamics of an organization that tries to be both a government and a movement at the same time. How do men and women behave in legislatures when they know that their being in office is not an end in itself, that they are in these institutions necessarily for a limited period? Does it make them more daring and reckless or does the oft-proclaimed "logic of constitutionalism" claim them and make them forget their original intentions?

The choice of the UP was an irresistible one, for, as Gyanendra Pandey has put it, the province "mirrored in a particularly acute form some of the principal opportunities and problems facing the nationalist movement in the country as a whole".[1] In the 1930s, this province adopted all the new political trends that were entering the Congress at this time, whether in the form of Congress socialism or of Royism or of mainstream communism which was more popular with industrial labour and university students. The Kisan Sabha, though not as powerful in the UP as in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, was nevertheless a force to reckon with. The province was equally quick to reject older trends: thus pure Gandhians or even those strongly influenced by Gandhian ideals were rather scarce in the province after 1934.

At first, I wondered whether too many scholars had worked on this province—perhaps I would have nothing new to offer. But

[1] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926–34: A Study in Imperfect Mobilization* (henceforth *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*), Delhi, 1978, p. 8.



Districts in UP c 1930

after several years of research on this region, I am now convinced that there remain vast, unmapped areas. There are far too few district-level studies, for one. The only regions that have been covered to some extent are Allahabad (C.A. Bayly), Kanpur (Chitra Joshi), Gorakhpur (Shahid Amin), Pratapgarh and other adjoining districts (Majid Siddiqui and Kapil Kumar), Rohilkhand (Lance Brennan), Aligarh (Zoya Hasan), Fyzabad (Harold Gould) and the Uttarakhand region (Shekhar Pathak and Ramchandra Guha). Of

course Benares has always had its own fascination for anthropologists and historians.[2] For the rest, we have to rely on gazetteers and settlement reports to give us a truly regional picture.

Although this work does not profess to fill all such gaps, an attempt is made to present the regional diversity, which is reflected in the different methods of mobilization employed by the leaders and the marked preference shown by some districts for a certain variant of nationalist activity as opposed to others.

The Civil Disobedience Movement and the Government of India Act of 1935 form the backdrop to the period of our study. It is a well-known fact that every constitutional concession made by the British Government in India was intended to strengthen its own position. In the 1930s, it was more crucial to co-opt the Congress into constitutional activity than ever before because that would weaken and dilute the forces of anti-imperialism which had gained so much strength and popularity during the course of the Civil Disobedience Movement.[3] The 1935 Act, with its proposals for extension of the franchise to roughly 13 per cent of the population and the creation of provincial autonomy along with a federal legislature at the centre, was intended to divert Congress energy into constitutional channels, to provincialize it and reduce its influence through countervailing representation for the princely states. The 1935 Act made bigger concessions to nationalism than ever before—and the hopes of consequently weakening the Congress were correspondingly higher as well. The comment of Sir Harry Haig, the UP Governor, in December 1937: "We are playing high stakes and we must take certain risks"[4] put the entire situation in a nutshell.

[2] Bernard Cohn, 'Structural Change in Indian Rural Society' in R.E. Frykenberg, ed., *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, Madison, 1969. Sandria Frietag, ed., *Culture and Power in Benares*, Delhi, 1989, Diana L. Eck, *Banaras: City of Light*, Delhi, 1993, Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*, Delhi, 1996, Nita Kumar, *The Artisans of Banaras*, New Delhi, 1988.

[3] "Officials were surprised at the strength and depth of Congress organisation displayed in civil disobedience." Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics, 1928–34*, Cambridge, 1977, p. 118. She cites Government of India, *Home Political File* 5/45/31 as evidence.

[4] Haig to the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1 (Microfilm, NMML).

Since ours is a study of the national movement in the UP, the growth of the Muslim League and communalism are dealt with only to a limited extent. This is not to overlook or deny the growing communalization of politics in India and especially in the UP in the 1930s. It is necessary to study the factors that led to this, including the role of the Congress ministries, but that would require separate treatment. Fortunately, other scholars have dealt with this aspect and I have relied on their findings.[5] The main focus of this study is on the Congress organization in this period and manner in which it dealt with the challenges thrown out by the British Government. We would also like to re-examine this constitutional phase of Congress activity to see how valid are the generally held suppositions about this period: namely that it was one during which the Congress did not exactly cover itself with glory; that the movement made compromises with all kinds of vested interests; and that mass activity was given up for reformism, to the ultimate detriment of the anti-imperialist movement.

The study of regional politics in the UP had been opened up in the 1960s with Paul Brass's *Factional Politics in an Indian State*.[6] Though largely a study of the post-Independence period, the work provided some useful insights into the leadership of the pre-1947 period as well. Through a study of five UP districts—Gonda, Aligarh, Deoria, Meerut and Kanpur—he sought to establish that the faction is "the basic unit of the Congress party in Uttar Pradesh". Faction belongs to the traditional order, in Brass's reckoning, and therefore factional politics is the "adaptation of the organisation to the traditional society". For Brass, politics revolves around personalities in conflict with each other and there is no attempt to comprehend the underlying socio-economic and cultural forces at work.[7] Moreover, rather than look at the cohesive forces in politics, he tends to look only at the divisive forces. Yet even the limited information that Brass provided was useful in

[5] Salil Misra, *A Narrative of Communal Politics: Uttar Pradesh, 1937–39*, New Delhi, 2001 and Antony Thomas's research on The Communal Problem and Provincial Autonomy: A Case Study of the UP and Punjab 1937–39.

[6] Paul Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh*, Bombay, 1966, p. 3.

[7] For a critique of the faction approach to Indian politics, see David Hardiman, "The Indian 'Faction': A Political Theory Examined", in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. 1, Delhi 1982, pp. 198–231 in which he shows

that it provided us with a map to traverse the unknown areas of the UP's political history in this period.

Gyanendra Pandey's study of the Congress in the UP from 1926–34 stands out as a pioneering effort,[8] though he reflects the biases of the Cambridge school. While recognizing the "amazing success" of the Congress in the UP during the 1920–21 period and providing excellent information about the actual work of the Congress in parts of the UP during the 1920s, as well as "the overall extension of the Congress's rural organisation" in the early 1930s, he operates from within the stimulus–response paradigm. The activities of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, for instance, are seen as being a response to the announcement of separate electorates for the "depressed classes" as part of the Communal Award of 1932.[9] Similarly he posits that "it was the imminence of elections, and in this instance also of the new constitution of 1935 that was to create a much extended electorate, that brought an active Congress organisation into being again...".[10] This is almost as if to say that were it not for the government initiatives, the Congress would have been totally without a political agenda.

Pandey is of the view that "as the organisation and strength of the Congress increased and the scale of its campaigns widened, the social depth of the movement actually diminished".[11] Hence the Civil Disobedience campaign evoked less response in the UP than the Non-Cooperation Movement a decade earlier. Going by this logic, there should have been even less depth to the movement between 1937–39 when the Congress held power at the provincial level. However, we do know that during the Ministry period Congressmen were more concerned with the problems of different classes of labour, the sub-tenants, agricultural labour, and the Scheduled Castes than ever before. The discussions in the UP Legislative Assembly and the speeches and mobilization in the countryside clearly reflect this, as I hope to bring out.

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from his study of the Kheda District of Gujarat that the "faction leader stereotype" cannot be applied to the major leaders of this region, which included Sardar Patel.

[8] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

Pandey also asserts that there was an alternative stream of popular politics within the Indian national movement. This stream was different in character and approach from the stream of "elite" politics represented by Gandhi and the Congress. "It was not bound down by legalism or constitutionalism. It often showed evidence of horizontal mobilization cutting across lines of faction and caste."[12] Thus in the inter-war period there were two streams of nationalism:

> which often crossed and influenced one another, but continued by and large to flow in their separate courses. There were several instances of their coming together but also many indications of a struggle for initiative as expressed negatively in the efforts of the Congress leadership to contest and if necessary suppress the stream of popular politics.[13]

Pandey's major critique of the Congress is that it tended to impose "an unprecedented degree of restraint on popular participation in Congress campaigns with regard to the issues as well as the manner of agitation."[14] This is part of a more generalized Left critique of the Congress which was reflected in some later writings on the peasant movement, for example, those of D.N. Dhanagare and Kapil Kumar[15] and then went on to find more complete expression in the Subaltern school.

The contention that there were two parallel streams of nationalism is rather extreme at one level. It was never clearly demonstrated either. In fact, there are enough studies to indicate that local-level movements required the protective umbrella of the larger, so-called "elite" movement to grow and be successful.[16] The cluster of such

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 217.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 205.

[15] D.N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India 1920–1950*, Delhi, 1983. Kapil Kumar, *Peasants in Revolt: Tenants, Landlords, Congress and the Raj in Oudh, 1886–1922* (henceforth *Peasants in Revolt*), Delhi, 1984.

[16] According to N.G. Ranga and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, the Non-Cooperation Movement "shook our peasants free from their age-old political slumber and dragged them, almost against their traditions into the whirlpool of our national political life." *History of the Kisan Movement*, Madras, n.d., reproduced in A.R. Desai, ed., *Peasant Struggles in India*, Delhi, 1979, p. 56. See also Chapters 16 and 27 of Bipan Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1988.

movements in different parts of the country during the course of the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements bear adequate testimony to this. Regarding the exercise of restraint, every organized movement in history has had to impose certain restrictions on its participants in the interests of realizing its main objectives and in accordance with its basic strategy and tactics. Where this was not done, the movement would either grow into something quite different from what was originally intended, or, left rudderless, would sink unless an alternative leadership was ready to take over mid-stream.

B.R. Tomlinson's *The Indian National Congress and the Raj*, which appeared two years before Pandey's work, is a study of the Congress in the 1930s and 1940s. In his understanding, there were two levels of leadership in the Congress: one at the centre which was "held together by obedience and self-sacrifice" and was concerned with building a national movement and the other in the provinces whose main concern was to "maintain, or improve, their position built up through internal politics within the PCCs and to extend such a position into dominance of all politics in their provinces or districts".[17] According to Tomlinson, the first level of leadership was always acting under the "inexorable pressure" of the second. While the book provides exhaustive information on the functioning of the Congress at the organizational level, the differences within the Congress Working Committee and the equation between national leaders and provincial Congressmen, it chooses to ignore the Congress as a mass organization altogether. Nowhere do the Indian people figure in Tomlinson's study. Instead we have power-hungry politicians seeking constantly to improve their bargaining position.

In Tomlinson's assessment, the 1937–39 period afforded immense scope for the Congress to wield influence and exercise power: "One of the major sources which had been opened up by the acceptance of office was the personal patronage of the Ministers."[18] However, within a space of 28 months "the fruits of ministerial office...were beginning to go rotten".[19] Yet it is intriguing that Tomlinson's power-hungry politicians were instantly willing to give up office

[17] B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929–1942: The Penultimate Phase* (henceforth *The Indian National Congress*), London, 1976, pp. 60–64.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

at the behest of the Congress High Command, having wielded political power for such a short time-span. For that, Tomlinson has no explanation, not even that offered by Reginald Coupland 30 years earlier:

> ...the intention to combat the constitution was more firmly maintained by the Congress Working Committee than by the Ministries, engrossed in their arduous and constructive work. The ultimate aim of full national self-government was never forgotten at Wardha...it was the 'high command's' attempt to obtain an enhancement of national status...that brought the whole regime in the Congress Provinces to an end.[20]

Nevertheless, Tomlinson's book provided information, where none existed until then, of the functioning of the Congress ministries and the major pieces of legislation undertaken—even if much of this was to show how the Congress manipulated and manoeuvred.

In Reba Som's recent work on the Congress in the 1929–39 period[21] we have a somewhat different approach. Instead of looking at micro-level factions and power-groups, she looks at the macro level—the Right and the Left wings of the Congress. The Right wing, according to her, "slowly evolved as a distinct coterie from the mid-thirties into an independent group" in response to "a decade-long confrontation with the Left groups operating within the Congress". However, she feels that in terms of the actual programme, a consensus was arrived at. Yet the two-year Congress ministry period, according to her, was one in which Right-wing opinion was "consolidated".[22] The Bose challenge and the Tripuri episode are viewed as demonstrating "the limitations of consensual politics".[23] She concludes that, by 1939, "the Right-wing consolidation was complete and, at the Congress leadership level, Left-wing challenge was neutralised".[24]

[20] R. Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India (Part II Indian Politics 1936–42)*, Oxford, 1944, p. 154.

[21] Reba Som, *Differences Within Consensus: The Left-Right Divide in the Congress 1929–39*, Delhi, 1995.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*

In our understanding, there was no such watershed in Congress politics in 1939. The period following the resignation of the Congress ministries was one in which different strategies continued to contend with each other: while Gandhi had a rather clear-cut strategy of rededication to the *charkha*, formation of *Satyagraha Samitis* and no mass movement immediately, M.N. Roy wanted cooperation with the British Government in the war efforts. The communists felt that the war had created a revolutionary situation in India and therefore a massive anti-British offensive must soon be launched.[25] It was not as if Gandhi's ideas in this period had uncritical acceptance. Perhaps never before during the Gandhian leadership were people, including Maulana Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru, so uncertain about the Gandhian formula. Besides this, there was the worrisome issue of which was the greater enemy—fascism or British imperialism? While Nehru's basic sympathies were with those fighting fascism, the sheer ham-fistedness of British policy in India, as unfolded by Lord Linlithgow, forced him to remember his anti-imperialist commitment from time to time. But more of that in a later chapter.

All this leads us to wonder whether a right-wing–left-wing approach to the Congress of the 1930s and 1940s is appropriate. As we shall demonstrate later in this work, the right-wing could indulge in what would normally be regarded as left-wing activity such as agrarian agitation and those who called themselves left-wingers were not averse to constitutional politics.[26] The left-right approach was adopted by the British to understand the Congress and in doing so they tended to graft British political practice (that is, the Liberal–Conservative divide) onto the Indian scenario. We should steer clear of these compartmentalizations, using them only very occasionally—or else we would be doing less than justice to the true Congressman, especially the UP Congressman in the post-1920 period.

The politics of consensus, according to Som, worked skilfully in the agitational phase of the Congress, but "proved short-lived

[25] CPI Policy Statement on Tactics During Imperialist Phase of War, *Joshi Archives* (henceforth *JA*), 1940/48.

[26] For a detailed treatment of this, see Neerja Singh, "The Right and the Right Wing Politics in the Congress, 1934–39", unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1985, pp. 20–46.

in the Ministry phase"[27] when the interests of some classes had to be compromised in the interests of others. Thus, in the UP, the "reforms were generally modest and largely designed to benefit the numerous petty landlords, traditional allies of the Congress. As a multi-interest party Congress however was bound to face criticism from both the bigger landlords and the Kisans, both of whom received little support from these measures."[28] The question which concerns us, apart from the validity of this analysis, is the impact that this had on the Congress organization in the long term. Was the Congress weakened by this tendency to reflect the interests of some classes more than of others?

Some of these themes have already been explored in the studies of individual Congress ministries undertaken in the last two decades. Thus we have Rani Dhawan Shankardass's study of the first Bombay ministry published in 1982 and Vinita Damodaran's more recent account of the Bihar ministry in a larger study of popular movements and the Congress in Bihar from 1935 to 1946.[29] These provide useful points of comparison. We shall deal with Vinita Damodaran's book first, because it broadly adheres to the Reba Som-type of argument. In her assessment there was a qualitative change in the Bihar Congress after the acceptance of office in 1937. Prior to that, she maintains, the Congress in Bihar was "able to incorporate a set of very disparate struggles into the national movement". With the acceptance of office, the Congress became identified with specific interest groups, fell back on imperial institutions and was "often forced to reproduce the structures of imperial authority".[30] Sunil Khilnani's book *The Idea of India* echoes the first part of Damodaran's argument: "The entry of Congress into the provincial electoral politics of the Raj would henceforth practically constrain the imaginative visions of the progressive intellectuals. It bound the party to alliances and commitments that came to dominate India's politics until at least the 1960s."[31]

[27] Reba Som, *Differences within Consensus*, p. 211.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 215.

[29] Rani Dhawan Shankardass, *The First Congress Raj: Provincial Autonomy in Bombay*, Delhi, 1982. Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar, 1935–46*, Delhi, 1992.

[30] Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises*, pp. 8–9.

[31] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, London, 1997, p. 74.

Shankardass, a political scientist, holds that "for all practical purposes...the Congress stepped into the shoes of its predecessor with relative ease...In practice all it carried out was the possible or the viable, or that desired by the stronger interest groups."[32] She also poses the question: "Did the change of hands from British imperialist to Indian nationalist at the provincial level make a great deal of difference to the ordinary man in the street...?" There is an element of condescension in the answer offered: "In India, the general feeling of the ordinary individual is one of awe towards government, any government." (In our study we found, on the contrary, that the ordinary individual perceived the Congress ministry to be very different from that of the British Government and was able to relate to it in a manner never possible earlier.) Shankardass goes on to maintain, erroneously in our view, that "the elements of feed-back and participation, which surely are two vital ingredients of any system that strives to be 'for the people' are never adequately emphasized or realized in India."[33]

These studies provide us with a useful set of hypotheses for a study of the 1937–39 ministry in the UP. Did the so-called politics of consensus break down or change drastically at this time? Did the functioning of the Pant ministry in the UP reflect the pressures of powerful interest groups or was an effort made to preserve the broad-based character of the movement? Is it true that in their functioning Congressmen were as British as the British themselves? Did the selfless nationalists turn power-hungry? And finally, was the experiment of the Congress entering office a disastrous one? These and other hypotheses are sought to be tested in the context of the Congress Ministry in the UP. This study also attempts to understand the new mood of the period. The assumption of office by the Congress aroused new hopes in the hearts of the multitudes. Different sections of society responded in their different ways to this new and heartening development. This will reveal itself as the chapters of this book unfold.

The first chapter traces the revival of the Congress organization from 1934 onwards and records the growth of new ideological forces and trends within the organization. Though it is an important issue, we have not dwelt on the debate on office acceptance,

[32] Rani Dhawan Shankardass, *The First Congress Raj*, p. 267.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

because it has been adequately treated elsewhere.[34] (We have, however, discussed the stand of the UP Congress on office acceptance.) Instead, we have examined the 1936–37 election campaign in some detail—treating it not just as an election campaign but as a process of mass mobilization. The chapter ends with an account of the new forms of activity that were generated by the campaign.

In Chapter 2 the focus shifts to the first Congress ministry in the UP. Here, legislation has been grouped under three heads: (*a*) that which was intended to create a new order in the province; (*b*) that which meant to improve the material conditions of the people; and (*c*) that which attempted to promote Congress ideals such as rural development, literacy and prohibition. In examining these, the constraints on and shortcomings of the Pant ministry are kept in mind. While there has been a general tendency, especially in Left circles, to dismiss this type of constitutionalism as inconsequential and even detrimental to anti-imperialism, we feel that in the UP legislature, we get one of the finest examples of constitutional behaviour, which many of our present-day legislators would be well advised to study and benefit from.

In the chapters that follow we look at the Congress organization as it functioned under the protective umbrella of the ministry. The impact of returning political prisoners to the province and the mushrooming of new ideological forces and groups have been assessed. The growing political role of students and the youth in these years is also discussed. There is also a detailed assessment of the functioning of two major Left groups in the province, that is, the UP Congress Socialist Party and the UP Kisan Sabha in terms of their leadership of the labour movements and of the agrarian upsurge during this period. All this naturally leads to a discussion of the structure and functioning of the UP Congress Committee, which was quite naturally called upon to perform a rather unprecedented role in the provincial autonomy period. How did it cope with the dual pressures of a Congress in office and a multitude

[34] Visalakshi Menon "National Movement, Congress Ministries and Imperial Policy: A Case Study of the UP 1937–39", unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1981. See also Gyanesh Kudaisya, "Office Acceptance and the Congress: Premises and Perceptions 1937–39", unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1985, and Marguerite Rose Dove, *Forfeited Future: The Conflict over Congress Ministries in British India 1933–1937*, Delhi, 1987.

of impatient Congress activists who, out of frustration, sometimes turned their ire against the PCC itself?

The last two chapters of this book deal with the post-ministry ethos from December 1939 to July 1942. Here, the main themes discussed are: the attempts by Gandhi to bring cohesion to an organization which had become dispersed and unwieldy; the changing attitudes of the top level Congress leadership towards the War; the scope and logic of the individual *satyagraha* campaign; and finally the very specific situation of 1942 which gave rise to the Quit India Movement.

In this study, British policy in relation to the Congress has not been dealt with as a separate theme largely due to constraints of space. However, the impact of Congress actions on the British administrators and the changing tactics of the latter have been alluded to from time to time.

Attempts have also been made in this work to discuss certain important questions: did office acceptance strengthen the anti-imperialist movement by creating (*a*) more space for the Congress and its allies and (*b*) a counter-hegemony to that of the British? Did it materially and psychologically improve the conditions of the people? At the end of the experiment, what was the equation between the Congress and the British Government and between the various forces within the Congress? Did the leadership of the movement undergo any significant changes during this period? These are some of the larger questions which we seek to answer in this study. Here, it would suffice to mention that there was a palpable difference in the post-1939 political environment as compared to the pre-1937 period. The experience of 28 months of Congress in office created a new ethos: it gave the people a new confidence and conviction that Indians could rule as well as, if not better than, the British. In several ways the increased prestige of the Congress revealed itself and the balance was tilted in favour of the anti-imperialist forces.

ONE

The Background: Revival of the Congress Organization in the UP

The repression unleashed by the British Government during the second phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement certainly paralyzed the Congress. But the damage was not irreparable, as the ensuing years revealed when the ranks of Congress sympathizers swelled and larger numbers joined the organization. There also grew a realization among groups hitherto outside the Congress—the revolutionary terrorists and those who had moved away from the Congress, for example, the communists—that it was important to remain within the nationalist mainstream, which was the Congress. With the entry of these groups into the broader national movement, it acquired greater depth, more strength and increased diversity.

For other reasons too the Congress of the 1930s had a richer hue than ever before. Its distinctly peasant character emerged in this period, thanks to the large-scale involvement of the rural masses in the Civil Disobedience Movement. In the following years, a new type of Congressman—the peasant activist—became prominent.[1] In provinces such as the UP, the number of peasant activists was

[1] Leaders such as Purshottamdas Tandon, Baba Ramchandra and Mohanlal Gautam had already made their mark in the 1920s. In the course of the Civil Disobedience Movement, more leaders such as Sri Krishna Dutt Paliwal, Kalka Das, Damodar Swarup Seth and Shibbanlal Saksena had emerged.

considerable and their influence within the organization clearly noticeable.

Radical influences on the Congress from outside the country were also greater in the 1930s. There was a large influx of Left-inclined Indian students from England and other parts of Europe. Many joined the Congress and were eager to impart their knowledge of the prevailing trends in Western political thought, be it Social Democracy or Marxism/Leninism,[2] to the people of India.

The political fabric of the UP in the 1930s was closely interwoven with different strands of nationalist political activity. It is important to realize, at the very outset, that these strands were not separate—they often blended into each other. It is only for academic purposes that we separate them: in reality, the politics of even the most constitutionalist of Congressmen like G.B. Pant allowed them to participate in some amount of agrarian activity and to express their admiration for socialist Russia.[3] Similarly revolutionary terrorists tried to adopt the Gandhian principle of non-violence, even while continuing with their secret underground activities. Virtually every district had a prominent leader who would combine a whole range of activities—from organizing the *kisans* to legislative activities to Gandhian constructive work. Bishambhar Dayal Tripathi was one such figure, though in his case the commitment to Gandhian ideals was rather weak.

In this chapter, our study of the organizational growth of the Congress in the UP is divided into three phases. The first phase from 1934 until the Lucknow Congress in April 1936 was almost entirely devoted to rebuilding the organization. In this period itself the ideological trends which would dominate the UP Congress revealed themselves. The second phase begins with the return of Nehru to India before the Lucknow Congress and ends with the

[2] Rammanohar Lohia, Z.A. Ahmed, Hajra Begum, K.M. Ashraf and Sajjad Zaheer were some prominent examples in the UP. With the exception of Lohia, the others were members of the Communist Party who, owing to the ban on the Communist Party of India (CPI), were instructed by their party to work within the Congress. Z.A. Ahmed, *Mere Jiwan Ki Kuch Yaden* (Hindi), Lucknow, 1997, pp. 127–31.

[3] "The State of Soviet Russia has really worked wonders. Its national wealth has grown by about 300 per cent." G.B. Pant's speech in the Central Legislative Assembly, censuring the Government, 9 March 1937, *Selected Works of Govind Ballabh Pant* (henceforth *SWGBP*), Vol. 7, p. 132.

success of the Congress in the elections to the Provincial Legislative Assembly in February 1937. This was a period of heightened political activity with whirlwind tours and daily election meetings. The post-election phase, from February until July 1937, began with high euphoria, a sense of triumph and attempts at forming a parallel government. But, as the months wore on without any decision on acceptance of office being taken, spirits drooped and enthusiasm waned. There was the danger of a return to the ennui of the 1933–34 period.

1934–35: Picking Up Old Threads, Adding New Ones

Civil Disobedience was officially suspended at first for a period of six weeks in May 1933. Thereafter, individual civil disobedience was pursued for a while. The total withdrawal of the movement was sanctioned by the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) at its Patna meeting in May 1934.[4] However, this did not mean that the Congress was left without a programme for the ensuing period. In fact, even as they were being released from jail, Congressmen were full of ideas regarding the future course of the movement. Some felt that it was necessary to review the merits and demerits of the Gandhian leadership; others were concerned about the new constitutional proposals being framed by the British Government (the Joint Parliamentary Committee Report was released in late 1934) and how the Congress would respond to these.[5] There were some heated discussions on whether the organization should give itself some time to recuperate or think in terms of reviving the mass movement in the near future. At the Patna session, the

[4] Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress* (henceforth *The History of the INC*), Vol. 1, 1885–1935, Bombay 1946, pp. 538, 571.

[5] "The Joint Parliamentary Committee proposals seemed to be more an attempt to placate reactionary British interests in India than an effort to give concessions to the nationalists." AICC newsletter No. 1 (1934) *Rajendra Prasad Papers* (Roll 1, Microfilm NMML). Nevertheless, major nationalist leaders such as Rajendra Prasad realised that "obviously India is not in a position to get her own today against the wishes of the British", Rajendra Prasad to Agatha Harrison, 16 December 1934, *AICC*/G-34/A/1934, pp. 199–201.

Congress High Command had placed great emphasis on the revival of the Provincial Congress Committees (PCCs). In the case of the UP, the three veterans—G.B. Pant, Mohanlal Saksena and Purshottamdas Tandon—were entrusted with the task.

In terms of concrete activity, there were at least three clearly recognizable paths that the organization could now take: one had been proposed by Gandhi shortly after the Poona meeting in July 1933.[6] It involved the dropping of all political activity for the time being and resorting to schemes for social upliftment such as *Harijan* welfare, rural development and the building of Hindu-Muslim Unity.[7] The second path was that of reviving the Swaraj Party and entry into the legislatures. This had been proposed by Dr M.A. Ansari while presiding over the Delhi Conference of Congress leaders in March 1933, held for this purpose. Between October 1933 and January 1934, S. Satyamurti, Jamnalal Bajaj, B.C. Roy and others joined the campaign to revive council entry especially in the light of the forthcoming Central Legislative Assembly election.[8] At the AICC session in mid-May 1934, a 25-member Congress Parliamentary Board was formed, which would control all election matters.[9] It was at the same time that the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) also came into existence in Patna. This party, which professed scientific socialism, claimed to be the "vanguard of the independence movement". It aimed at radicalizing the Congress through working almost entirely amongst the peasantry and labour on the one hand and leaving "no stone unturned to expose the follies and reactionary policies of the Congress High Command", on the other.[10] The CSP reacted most adversely to the second path available to the Congress, namely constitutionalism.[11]

[6] N.N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, (henceforth *IAR*), Calcutta, 1933, Vol. 2, pp. 331–35.

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 1, p. 567.

[9] *Ibid*., p. 571.

[10] Sampurnanand on "Our Role in the Congress", February 1935, *AICC*/ 3/1935, pp. 1–2. See also CSP General Secretary's Circular to Members of the Party, *The Pioneer*, 5 July 1935 and Acharya Narendra Dev's speeches at the first AICC session at Patna, 1934 and at Gujarat Socialist Party Conference, June 1935. *Towards a Socialist Society*, Delhi, 1979, pp. 186–99 and 66–67 respectively.

[11] "...a favourable atmosphere is being silently created for working of the reforms and the mind of the nation is being silently prepared step by step for

As we shall see, Congressmen in the UP were generally disinclined to take the first path—as for the latter two, they divided themselves into fairly evenly matched groups, one of which adopted the path of Congress Socialism and the other that of entry to the Council. However, these two paths would sometimes run into each other.

The significant growth of socialism in the province was attributed by one source to Jawaharlal Nehru who had tried to propagate the socialist ideology amongst Congress workers in the province when he was briefly out of jail from July 1933 to February 1934.[12] This work was now being followed up by "a large number of Congress workers including some of the prominent persons of this Province". What was more, socialist parties had been formed in a number of districts in the UP.[13] The earliest group of socialists had gathered together in Benares.[14] It was in this city that a socialist deputation led by Acharya Narendra Dev had met Gandhi in July 1934, during his *Harijan* tour of the province. They sought the Mahatma's help to incorporate the socialist programme into that of the Congress.[15] Later, they even submitted a draft of the CSP programme to Gandhi for his comments.[16]

What accounted for the remarkable growth of socialism in a province such as the UP? There were several contributory factors but the strongest indication was that Congress Socialism was growing at the expense of Gandhism at this time. The latter, after having drawn people of different political propensities into its fold for nearly a decade and a half, now seemed to be losing its

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acceptance of such a policy...if we do not at once mobilise public opinion in favour of a wrecking policy all will be lost." Acharya Narendra Dev at Gujarat Socialist Party Conference, June 1935, *Towards a Socialist Society*, pp. 66–67.

[12] Mohanlal Saksena's report of Congress work for June 1934, *AICC* P-20/(Part II)/1934, p. 535. However, this does not seem to be endorsed in Nehru's speeches and correspondence recorded in *SWJN*, Vol. 6 (Out of Prison). Nehru's emphasis on socialism was far more pronounced in 1936, especially in the course of the election campaign. See *SWJN*, Vol. 7, for details.

[13] *Ibid*.

[14] Acharya Narendra Dev's presidential address at the first conference of All India Congress Socialists, Patna, 1934 printed in *Towards a Socialist Society*, p. 199. *Home Poll*, 18/9/34, Fortnightly Report for the UP for the first half of September 1934 (henceforth FR UP i or ii).

[15] *CWMG*, Vol. 58, p. 253.

[16] *Ibid*., pp. 274–75.

appeal.[17] So severe was the repression during the second phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement that erstwhile Gandhi followers began to question the adequacy of his methods. Sri Prakasa, son of the veteran Benares Congressman Bhagwan Das, wrote to Nehru on 18 November 1935:

> My great sorrow of late has been that I have lost faith even in Gandhiji, not because of his methods and ideas, but because of the sudden changes that...take place in him which throw us all in confusion both of thought and activity.[18]

Many alternatives were examined and, to many, Soviet Russia seemed the answer. After the revolutionary overthrowal of the Czarist regime in 1917 and the problems of the early years, the Soviet Union seemed to be doing fairly well in the 1930s. The boom in the Soviet economy during the years of the Great Depression was like a miracle. All reports from Soviet Russia gave glowing accounts and the less savoury aspects of the Stalinist regime were practically unknown.[19] As Acharya Narendra Dev put it, there was a feeling that a crisis had come over democracy in the West and that parliamentary institutions were crumbling on all sides. The fascist menace was also growing apace and increasingly the choice before the world was now between fascism and socialism. Capitalist democracy had no future.[20] Besides, in the words of Jawaharlal

[17] In mid-1933, Vithalbhai Patel and Subhas Bose had issued a statement to Reuter from Vienna stating "we are clearly of the opinion that Mr Gandhi as a political leader has failed. The time has, therefore, come for a radical reorganization of the Congress with a new principle and a new method for which a new leader is essential." Cited in Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 1, p. 561.

[18] *Jawaharlal Nehru Papers* (henceforth *JN Papers*), Part 1, Vol. 96, p. 50.

[19] The General Administration Report for 1934–35 noted the appearance of several newspapers in the UP which expressed socialistic views. They "sought to represent Russia as a modern utopia for peasants and labourers." *General Administration Department* (henceforth *GAD*), 1934–35, pp. x–xi. See also Acharya Narendra Dev's presidential speech at the Patna session of the Congress Socialist Conference in 1934, *Towards a Socialist Society*, pp. 194–95.

[20] Acharya Narendra Dev's presidential address at the Gujarat Congress Socialist Conference at Ahmedabad, 23–24 July 1935, from *Towards a Socialist Society*, p. 146.

Nehru's biographer, S. Gopal, by the 1930s, "throughout India there were men and women who, along with nationalist feeling, had developed a conscience on economic matters."[21] In the case of the UP, most active Congressmen had been drawn into the agrarian movement, especially in the course of the Civil Disobedience campaign. Hence it was but natural for them to be receptive to the idea of a party which accorded primacy to peasant issues.

Government sources noted that the province showed indifference to Gandhian programmes even during the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to the province. They attributed this to the fact that Gandhi refused to discuss political matters—dwelling only on the "social side of the Congress programme", that is, *khaddar prachar* (spreading the message of *khadi*) and *Harijan* welfare.[22] In the UP, according to official sources, *Harijan* activity was virtually non-existent.[23] As for the All-India Village Industries Association (AIVIA), branches were established in Mathura, Gorakhpur and Meerut during 1934. But they were reported to have met with little success and soon the provincial organizing centre in Mathura District had to be wound up due to financial difficulties.[24] Later, it was alleged that the AIVIA was being "improperly used in place of the banned Congress volunteer organisation the Hindustani Seva Dal to organize meetings of peasants and workers in support of the 'socialist' faction of the PCC."[25]

Elections for the UPCC were held in August–September 1934 and the Socialists performed impressively. The president of the UPCC (Sri Prakasa), four Vice Presidents, four of the six Secretaries, seven of the 11 members of the executive committee and 26 of the 46 provincial representatives were socialists.[26] The districts where socialism was clearly "on the ascendant" were Allahabad (under P.D. Tandon), Benares (under Sampurnanand and Sri Prakasa) and

[21] S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol. 1, 1889–1947, Bombay, 1976, p. 214.

[22] *Home Poll*, 18/8/34, FR UP i.

[23] "'Harijan Day' at the end of last month passed practically unobserved in marked contrast to the enthusiasm displayed on this occasion last year." *Home Poll*, 18/10/34, FR UP i.

[24] *GAD, UP Administration Report*, 1934–35, p. vi.

[25] B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress*, p. 50.

[26] *Home Poll*, 18/9/34, FR UP i .

Kanpur (under Balkrishna Sharma).[27] With this clear majority in the PCC, the CSP set about shaping the course of provincial Congress activity in accordance with the party's ideals. But the commitment of the socialists in the UP was severely tested in October 1934, when the question of contesting elections to the Central Legislative Assembly (CLA) came up. Despite the CSP's vehement denunciation of council entry, a section of the party was in favour of contesting the elections. Sri Prakasa was a candidate for the CLA. He chose to resign from the CSP and contest the election. But the matter did not end there. Many other socialists in the UP justified Sri Prakasa's decision. Ultimately, the UPCSP broke away from the AICSP on the question of contesting elections to the CLA.[28] However, this incident must not be taken to indicate that UP Congress Socialists were tempted by office at this juncture. As *The Pioneer* put it, elections to the Central Legislative Assembly in 1934 "had been fought principally on two issues, namely the White Paper and the repressive policy of Government in the last three or four years."[29] When the new Legislative Assembly met, one of the first actions of the Congress was to move a resolution rejecting the Joint Parliamentary Committee's proposals.[30] And when the recently concluded Trade Pact between Britain and India was placed before the Assembly, government sources were alarmed at the prospect of its rejection by the combined majority of the Congress, the Nationalists and the Independents.[31]

Actual ground level Congress work was extremely paltry in 1934. Apart from a few visits by Purshottamdas Tandon to the rural areas of Rae Bareli, there was hardly any Kisan activity.[32] Most of the time was spent on electioneering—both for the CLA and the Congress committees. Some membership enrolment was done but the numbers enroled were unimpressive.[33] A conference of peasants

[27] *Home Poll*, 18/10/34, FR UP i.

[28] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, p. 72.

[29] *The Pioneer*, 23 November 1934, p. 16.

[30] *The Pioneer*, 2 December 1934, p. 1.

[31] *The Pioneer*, 30 January 1935, pp. 1 and 6.

[32] *Home Poll*, 18/7/34, FR UP i.

[33] The highest enrolment figures were for Lucknow and Fatehpur with 500 each. Rae Bareli with 400 came second and Aligarh third with 300. The

called at Mathura was reportedly "a failure".[34] Two peasant conferences in Bijnor and Kanpur districts held in early December 1934 attracted "comparatively larger audiences".[35] The first report of a Kisan Sabha came at this time, from Ballia district.[36]

All this notwithstanding, a PCC meeting in Lucknow on 1 and 2 December 1934, resolved "to organize peasants and workers on the basis of their class demands". A three-member committee consisting of P.D. Tandon, G.B. Pant and Mohanlal Gautam was constituted to "formulate the immediate demands of peasants" and "to suggest ways and means of organizing the peasantry". Another five member committee was set up to organize labour and educated young men to ensure "their better and more intensive participation in the national movement".[37] In February 1935, a third committee was constituted to carry on publicity work for the party and to educate the masses on socialism.[38]

It is noteworthy that the first two committees included Congressmen who were generally regarded as "right-wingers". It points to the general acceptance of the CSP programme in the province. The willingness to work together was also perhaps due to the strong ties that had been forged in the course of the agrarian movement during 1931–33. This was in marked contrast to the spirit in other provinces, such as Gujarat and Bihar, where there was open hostility between the socialist and non-socialist groups.[39] The difference between the scenario in the UP and the other provinces mentioned

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average enrolment numbers were 100–250 per district, *AICC*/P-20/1934, Part II, p. 547.

[34] *Home Poll*, 18/10/34, FR UP i.

[35] *Home Poll*, 18/12/34, FR UP i.

[36] *Ibid*.

[37] The members of this latter committee were to be: Mohanlal Saksena, Acharya Narendra Dev, Hariharnath Shastri, Raja Ram Shastri and A.G. Kher. It may be noted that these committees included non-socialists as well. *AICC*/P-20 (Part II)/1934, p. 153. Also *Home Poll*, 18/12/34, FR UP i.

[38] *The Pioneer*, 18 February 1935, p. 7. The members of the committee were Sampurnanand and Kamlapati Tripathi, Benares leaders and Kanpur labour leaders Hariharnath Shastri and Kamlapati Tripathi, Raja Ram Shastri, editor of *Mazdoor*.

[39] For Gujarat see Narhari Parikh's letter to Patel about combating the Socialists of Gujarat, P.N. Chopra, ed., *Collected Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel* (henceforth *CWSVP*), Vol. 5, p. 126. For Bihar see Bhagwan Josh, *Struggle for Hegemony in India 1920–47*, Vol. 2, pp. 90–91.

earlier was that, in the former, there was a greater tolerance and general acceptance of socialist ideals and strategies than in the latter. However, this point has to be made with some caution. The proceedings of the annual provincial political conference at Etawah revealed the undercurrents of tension between the two. Two conferences were to be held: one described as the "orthodox" meeting attended by non-socialists yet presided over by Sri Prakasa, the erstwhile socialist and president of the UPCC. The other was a Congress Socialist conference. Attendance was in the region of 600–700 at both conferences, which were reportedly marked by mutual distrust and hostility between socialist and non-socialist groups.[40] The two conferences obviously reflected the sharp differences over personalities, topical issues and ideologies which was the most distinct feature of the UP Congress organization at this time.[41]

Another issue which polarized Congress opinion in the province at this time was the Communal Award. This Award, announced by the British Government in August 1932, was part of the constitutional reform package intended for India. It allotted to each all-India minority a number of seats in the legislatures on the basis of

[40] The Socialist conference passed a resolution expressing its deep concern "at the fact that there exists a clique within the Congress whose evil influence is making the Congress policy reactionary and diverting the attention of the country from the goal of complete independence." Sardar Patel was mentioned by name. *Home Poll*, 18/12/34 FR UP ii.

[41] There were factions in practically every district which had seen Congress activity over the past several years. In Allahabad, Benares, Kanpur and Lucknow they were worst. In Allahabad as seen earlier, there were two groups—headed by Pandit Sunderlal and P.D. Tandon. In Lucknow the warring parties were headed by C.B. Gupta and Gopinath Srivastava. In 1935, C.B. Gupta was president of the Lucknow City Congress Committee. Gopinath Srivastava tried to undercut Gupta's support by enroling many members loyal to himself. Gupta tried to stall this move by restricting the number of enrolment forms given to Srivastava, upon which the latter got his own membership forms printed. *AICC*/P-20/1934 Part 1, p. 199. This continuing animosity paralyzed preparations for the Congress Lucknow session of April 1936. The matter was only resolved when an executive committee was set up to look after the arrangements and the two contending factions were given equal representation on the committee. *Ibid*.

In Kanpur, Purshottamdas Tandon was sent in 1936 to investigate complaints about the existence of a rival Congress to the official one which was headed by Dr Murarilal. *Ibid*., pp. 73–74.

separate electorates. In addition to Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, the Depressed Classes were also to be treated as a minority.[42] The Congress strongly disagreed with the Communal Award but resolved to neither accept it nor oppose it.[43] Its stand, that any changes in the Award could only be made with the consent of the minorities, created ambiguity. Was the Congress not representative of the minorities? Moreover, to seek a change in the Communal Award would imply that the Congress accepted the framework of the British system and only wanted a change within that framework. In any case the Congress was eager to distance itself from those Hindu communal groups which called for an outright rejection of the Award.[44]

Madan Mohan Malaviya was thoroughly disgusted with the Congress stand on the Communal Award. (Interestingly, so was Purshottamdas Tandon, at the time a Congress Socialist.) Gandhi, on his visit to the province in July 1934, tried to placate him but failed.[45] Consequently, Malaviya (and his followers) withdrew first from the Congress Parliamentary Board (set up in May 1934 at Patna) and then from the Congress in August 1934 to form a new party, the Nationalist Party. He thus repeated his action of 1926 when he had broken away from the Motilal Nehru-led Swaraj Party to form the Independent Congress Party, after accusing Nehru and others of being "Muslim sympathizers".[46] Malaviya's action of August 1934 had major repercussions in the UP, especially in Allahabad and Benares. In the latter district, Malaviya's

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In Pratapgarh there were rival claimants to the presidentship of the District Congress Committee. While the officially elected president was Shyamsundar Shukla, Munshi Singh had taken over on the grounds that the former was "not doing any work". Disputes also arose because Munshi Singh and Keshav Prasad Varma supported rival candidates for the local board elections. An arbitrator had to be appointed by the PCC to resolve matters. Report from Ramkumar Shastri, Assistant Secretary, PCC, dated 20.8.35, *AICC*/11/1935, pp. 34–35.

[42] Bipan Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, p. 290.

[43] Working Committee resolution on the White Paper cited in Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 1, 1885–1935, p. 575.

[44] See Jawaharlal Nehru on "Hindu and Muslim Communalism", 27 November 1933, *SWJN*, Vol. 6, especially pp. 168–69.

[45] *Home Poll*, 18/8/34, FR UP i.

[46] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, p. 203.

followers resigned from the district, town and lower-level Congress organizations.[47]

The resignation of Malaviya's followers from the Congress could have augured well for the secular image of the Congress but it was impossible to keep them away from the party for too long—for they were too much a part and parcel of the organization. Shortly after the Lucknow Congress session of April 1936, Nehru began negotiations with Malaviya for an electoral alliance with the Nationalist Party. In March 1937, after the elections to the Provincial Legislative Assembly, a pact was signed between Malaviya and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai whereby Congress Nationalists would support the Congress in all except communal matters in the legislature. This virtually obliterated all differences between the two groups.[48]

The year 1935 began on a more promising note. District-level Congress leaders were moving out of their districts more often to address meetings in distant places.[49] Kisan Sabha units were reported to have been set up in many districts. In many parts of the UP, the *rabi* (spring) crop had been damaged by untimely rain, hail and frost. This, combined with a feeble monsoon which affected the *kharif* (autumn) crop, caused considerable distress to the peasants.[50]

The big event of the year was the UP Provincial Kisan Conference, held at Allahabad in April 1935. Preparations for the conference had begun three months earlier, with Mohanlal Gautam announcing his intention to form Kisan Sabhas in every district of the province before the conference was held.[51] That this kind of long-term preparation for a conference was an effective way of mobilizing the peasantry has been shown by Mridula Mukherjee in her work on Punjab.[52] The Socialists, who in this phase believed

[47] *Home Poll*, 18/8/34, FR UP i.

[48] S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol. 1, pp. 208–9.

[49] Thus Bishambar Dayal Tripathi, an Unnao leader and Damodar Swarup Seth of Bareilly attended the Basti District Political Conference in January 1935. *Home Poll*, 18/11/35, FR UP ii.

[50] *GAD, UP Administration Report*, 1934–35, pp. i–ii.

[51] *Home Poll*, 18/2/35, FR UP ii.

[52] Mridula Mukherjee has observed that each such major conference provided an opportunity for local leaders and cadres to initiate a flurry of activity. "A series of small and big meetings in villages would be held to advertise

in effecting a "takeover" of the Congress, saw in this conference a splendid opportunity to promote their programme. Leaflets were prepared and circulated at the conference.

Interestingly, Sardar Patel was invited to preside over the conference, not just by Purshottamdas Tandon but by the more left-wing Mohanlal Gautam himself, who was the Secretary-General of the conference. Patel explained in his presidential address that he was only substituting for Jawaharlal Nehru, who was away in Europe tending to his ailing wife.[53] He was well aware of the possibility of many of his statements not being welcomed by those present at the conference. He repeatedly emphasized that it was the government which was responsible for the present plight of the Kisans and not the zamindars. He went on to clarify, however, that "I have no soft corner for the zamindars. If the Kisans can rid themselves of the burden of the zamindars and they can improve their lot, I would be the happiest of men."[54] But he was of the view that the Kisans should strengthen themselves by (*a*) seeking the help of panchayats rather than the courts for the redressal of their grievances; (*b*) refraining from spending lavishly on funeral feasts and on marriages; and (*c*) removing any caste and religious distinctions among themselves. He concluded by saying that it was futile to talk about the abolition of the zamindari system. "That is something to be done in future and if we insist on it today our cause would suffer."[55] Patel's speech, according to government sources, annoyed the Socialists greatly—they had even tried to prevent him from speaking. They apparently found all their plans for a takeover being scotched by this right-wing leader's presence at the conference.[56] They tried to repair the damage done to their cause by

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the date, venue and star attractions of the conference, to collect funds and grain, and explain the reasons for the holding of the conference. Activists would tour the rural area in groups, consolidating their hold on already existing strongholds and trying to use the occasion to gain an entry into unfamiliar terrain." 'Agrarian Structure and Peasant Movement in the Punjab 1925–1947", unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, JNU, 1993, Vol. 3, pp. 1054–55.

[53] Patel's presidential address at the UP Kisan Conference, 28 April 1938, *CWSVP*, Vol. 5, p. 82.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[56] *Home Poll*, 13/5/35, FR UP i.

[57] *Ibid.*

holding meetings to explain their stand but had little success.[57] Nevertheless, the conference adopted several resolutions which closely resembled the Socialist programme and were to form the blueprint for the UP Congress's agrarian policy during the next several years.[58] But no resolution on the abolition of zamindari was passed.

For the first time after the Civil Disobedience Movement, the tradition of holding district political conferences was revived in some areas.[59] There were occasional village and *tahsil*-level conferences as well.[60] Activity also revolved around the celebration of various days such as Lajpat Rai Day, Motilal Nehru Day, Independence Day, Anti-Joint-Parliamentary Committee Report Day, etc.[61] Since Congress funds were rather depleted at this time, an attempt was made to raise finances through the holding of swadeshi exhibitions.[62]

In the meantime the Congress Socialists had initiated some trade union activity especially in Benares, Meerut, Kanpur and Lucknow.[63] In this sphere the Communists and Socialists worked in unison, though no formal agreement had yet been arrived at between the two. This work was intensified in 1936. The Lucknow City Congress Committee reported that it had unionized municipal scavengers and organized strikes of *tongawalas* (horse-cart drivers),

[58] The resolutions related to reduction of rent and revenue to the level prevailing in 1895; abolition of debts of those tenants who were unable to pay; urging of Kisans to resist payment of *nazrana* and *begar*, etc. *Home Poll*, 7/5/35. Report on Kisan Conference held in April 1935 at Allahabad.

[59] Saharanpur and Basti held their political conferences in January 1935. *Home Poll*, 18/1/35, FR UP ii. Agra held its conference in February. *Home Poll*, 18/2/35, FR UP ii.

[60] *Tahsil* conferences were held in Saharanpur and Jalaun in February. *Home Poll*, 18/2/35, FR UP ii. Village conferences were held in Mathura and Etawah in March. *Home Poll*, 18/3/35, FR UP i.

[61] UPCC Report for 1935, *AICC*/P-29/1935, p. 99.

[62] *Home Poll*, 18/1/35, FR UP i.

[63] A Mazdur Sangh was formed in Benares which was to be affiliated to the All-India Mazdur Sangh. A sub-committee was also set up to organize workers of the local cotton and silk mills. An Unemployed Workers Union was constituted at Meerut. In Lucknow, paper and cotton mill workers were being unionized. Strikes were being fomented in the Kanpur Kamlapat Cotton Mills. *Home Poll*, 18/2/35, FR UP i.

hawkers, press workers and cotton textile mill workers.[64] A railway union was already in existence. As we shall see in an ensuing chapter, mobilizing the workers usually meant forming a union and then organizing a strike around some economic demand or the other. The adequacy of these methods needs to be examined. It appears that, in real terms, very little was actually achieved.

There was a slight improvement in the Congress enrolment position in 1935. Yet it was pointed out by government sources that in no district was the complete quota filled. On an average only 50 per cent of the quota had been met in most districts. Kanpur with a figure of 10,526 members was the only exception.[65]

Other forms of activity revived in 1935–36 were the re-constitution of the Hindustani Seva Dal (HSD) and volunteer training organization.[66] This was notwithstanding the continued ban on the HSD by the British Government. Lucknow even held a volunteer training camp in March 1936, which was inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru.[67]

Thus a semblance of normal functioning had been restored during 1935. The fact that the year marked the golden jubilee of the formation of the Indian National Congress was of some significance. But the real boost was given by the Lucknow Congress session held in April 1936. For some time, however, it seemed as if Lucknow would be unable to hold the session. Factionalism in city-level politics had reached such a pitch that, as pointed out earlier, the two warring groups, headed by Gopinath Srivastava and C.B. Gupta, were determined to prevent the holding of the session. Matters were finally resolved when an executive committee was appointed, with equal membership from both groups, to look after the arrangements for the session.[68]

[64] Lucknow City Congress Committee's reply to questionnaire on Mass Contacts, *Jayaprakash Narayan Papers*, (henceforth *JP Papers*) File No. 116, pp. 162–64.

[65] *Home Poll*, 18/6/35, FR UP ii.

[66] *Home Poll*, 18/4/35, FR UP i. An EC meeting of the UPCC on April 6 and 7 decided to revive the Hindustani Seva Dal either in Benares, Lucknow or Agra. Also, *Home Poll*, 18/6/35, FR UP ii.

[67] *SWJN*, Vol. 7, pp. 164–65.

[68] *AICC*/P-20/1934, p. 199.

1936–37: The Lucknow Congress and the Election Campaign

Jawaharlal Nehru's return to India in 1936 and to the UP in particular, had a vitalizing effect on the Congress as a whole. This can be gleaned from the alarm caused in police circles by his reappearance on the political scene. In the course of a debate in the UP Legislative Council on the Police budget for 1936–37, the Inspector General of Police insisted that the existing staff should not be reduced because

> with Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru's return to liberty and his election as president of the Congress, political agitation is on the increase. For instance, numerous public meetings are held; new "days" are being organised (we are having or have had a Subhas Chandra Bose Day, an Abyssinia Day and a Dr Ansari Day) and the Congress had placed before it a definite agrarian programme. The Socialists and Communists are organising themselves....[69]

Nehru's biographer S. Gopal has noted that the authorities regarded him as "a potential danger of the first magnitude" and were extremely eager to have him arrested.[70] But for several reasons, not least of which was the change in British policy to one of appeasement so as to ensure the working of the 1935 Act, Jawaharlal could not be arrested.

Nehru's return to India aroused great hopes in the minds of the Socialists. What happened to these expectations? S. Gopal, maintains that "Left-wing forces had cause to be disappointed with the Lucknow Congress."[71] In his reckoning, all the resolutions passed at the session had a rightward tilt. The prominent industrialist, G.D. Birla was said to have remarked somewhat gleefully: "Jawaharlalji's speech in a way was thrown into the waste paper

[69] *UP Home Police* File 81/1936, Cover III, p. 9. Debate of 25 and 26 March 1936.

[70] S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol. 1, p. 210.

[71] *Ibid.*, pp. 208–9.

basket because all the resolutions that were passed were against the spirit of his speech."[72]

What actually happened at the Lucknow Congress? T. Prakasam and J.B. Kripalani spoke at length on the dangers of staying out of the legislatures and the inability of the Congress to resort to another mass movement immediately.[73] However they preferred not to carry these arguments to their logical conclusion, which was acceptance of office—for they felt that the time had not yet arrived for such a crucial decision to be taken. As the resolution on the Government of India Act put it,

> The question of acceptance or non-acceptance of office by Congress members elected to the legislatures under the constitution having been agitated in the country the Congress, in view of the uncertainties of the situation as it may develop, considers it inadvisable to commit itself to any decision at this stage on the question and leaves it to be decided at the proper time by the AICC after consulting the Provincial Congress Committee.[74]

The Congress Socialists were sceptical of this tendency to postpone decisions. For them, the logic of the situation was extremely clear: the policy of the British Government was at all times intrinsically the same

> The British Government has an army of occupation in this country. Does the Working Committee think that the army of occupation is going to be withdrawn or does the Working Committee think that the British Government is going to abdicate before the new Government of India Act comes into operation?[75]

Hence, merely to wait in the hope that the variables in the situation would change was, in their understanding, futile. The

[72] Gopal himself observed: "There was not the faintest suspicion of socialism in any of the resolutions." *Ibid.*, p. 205.

[73] *Report of the 49th Session of the Indian National Congress*, Allahabad, n.d., pp. 54–57 and 72–75. See also *AICC/G-26/1936*.

[74] Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, p. 12.

[75] Thomas A. Rusch, "Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress, 1931–42" (henceforth "Role of the CSP in the INC"), unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1955, pp. 297–98.

Congress must take a firm decision to reject office at this juncture—and a failure to do so would indicate that the leadership was "faulty" and given to a "defeatist mentality".[76]

On the other hand it is well known that the mass contacts resolution was enthusiastically welcomed by the Socialists who "conceived of the [mass contacts] committee as a vehicle for negotiating with the AITUC and the AIKS and similar organizations, over joint cooperation on vital political and economic issues."[77] Another resolution calling upon PCCs to prepare a report on agrarian conditions in their respective provinces was also promising. The UPCC was one of the few committees to act on this resolution. A five-man committee consisting of G.B. Pant, Purshottamdas Tandon, Sampurnanand, Venkatesh Narain Tiwari and Lal Bahadur Shastri invited the cooperation of all existing Kisan Sabhas and submitted its report on 25 November 1936. The committee (which in actual effect worked without Pant) recommended the abolition of the zamindari system, though there were differences on whether zamindars should be compensated or not at the time of abolition. Members of the committee were not able to reach a consensus on the system to be introduced after zamindari had been abolished either, that is peasant proprietorship or state ownership of land.[78]

Jawaharlal Nehru, on his tours of the country after the Lucknow session, spoke at length on socialism, thereby giving it greater legitimacy.[79] Meanwhile the CSP had, in turn, given up its strategy of "alternative leadership" (so disastrously pursued as seen earlier) and replaced it with one of "composite leadership".[80] The Royists, who had now entered the CSP are believed to have played a major role in this revision of the CSP programme.[81] The new slogan entailed cooperation with all sections of the Congress in the herculean effort to take the entire Congress organization onto the leftward path.

[76] *Ibid*.

[77] *Ibid*.

[78] *Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report*, 1936, reprinted, Gurgaon, n.d., Chapter IV, p. ii.

[79] See, for instance, Section 4 of *SWJN*, Vol. 7.

[80] Rusch, "Role of the CSP in the INC", p. 330.

[81] J.P. Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India: M.N.Roy and Comintern Policy, 1920–39*, New Jersey, 1971, pp. 233–36.

Despite all the misgivings about the 1935 Act, a decision to contest the elections had been taken at the Lucknow Congress session. However there was no commitment to acceptance of office. The election campaign was begun in May 1936 by Nehru himself. The election manifesto, drafted by Nehru, drew heavily upon the 1931 Karachi Resolution on Fundamental Rights and Duties and the Economic and Social Programme drawn up at the same Congress session, as well as the agrarian resolution passed at Lucknow.[82] It gained the approval of the Socialists as well. In the UP, the election campaign was flagged off on 1 August 1936.

This campaign was a great morale booster for the Congress. The franchise having been lowered to include all those paying a land revenue of Rs 10 and more or rent of Rs 25 and more, a sizable portion of the rural populace was enfranchised for the first time.[83] In the urban areas, all those who had passed the upper primary examination had the vote. (It may be recalled that, since 1926, women were allowed to vote as well: under the 1935 Act, they could elect three representatives to the UP Legislative Assembly.) Three special labour seats had also been created, to which industrial workers who earned a minimum of Rs 15 per month and had been in constant employment for the previous six months could elect their representatives.[84]

Who were the Congress men and women contesting elections to the UP Legislative Assembly? A close study of their political antecedents and economic status is not possible here—but an overview can be given. The commonly-held view is that in India as a whole, Congress candidates were usually men of means, who had to finance their own campaign in the absence of enough funds with the all-India or provincial Congress organization. They were often zamindars and belonged to a socially dominant caste.[85] It

[82] For the resolutions passed at the Karachi session of the Congress in March 1931, see Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 1, pp. 456–65. For Congress Election Manifesto, see *AICC*/G-41/1936.

[83] This has led some writers on the Congress to infer that the "most significant group to join the Congress in the 1930s were middle level agriculturalists and professional men with strong links to rural areas." Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress*, p. 76 quoting from S.A. Kochanek's *The Congress Party of India: The Dynamics of One Party Democracy*, Princeton, 1968, pp. 370–404.

[84] P.D. Reeves, *Elections in Uttar Pradesh*, Delhi, 1975.

has also been observed that some of the candidates were not "really Congressmen" but had, "to serve their own purpose, adopted the Congress because it suited them as well as local Congressmen with a view to secure support."[86] How true was this of the UP?

A survey shows that in some districts of the western UP "men of means" were indeed selected as Congress candidates. In Meerut, Bareilly, Banda, Budaun and Etawah the entire expense of electioneering was being borne by the candidates themselves.[87] But in the western UP districts, that is, Mathura, Etah, Etawah (one candidate), Muzaffarnagar, Dehradun and Agra the local Congress or the PCC or other local sources were bearing the brunt of election expenses.[88] The picture changes as we move towards central and eastern UP. While in Bahraich and Pratapgarh local *taluqdar*s were

[85] Lance Brennan in "From One Raj to Another Congress Politics in Rohilkhand, 1930–50", D.A. Low, ed., *Congress and the Raj: Facets of Indian Struggle, 1914–47* (henceforth *Congress and the Raj*), New Delhi, 1977, p. 479, has observed: "In each of the districts of Rohilkhand" (which covered the districts of Bareilly, Moradabad, Pilibhit, Shahjahanpur, Budaun and Bijnor) "apart from Moradabad, one of the candidates nominated to contest a rural seat was a zamindar with strong caste support."

See also Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*: "When the Congress returned to the electoral arena after the years of Civil Disobedience there was again a need to find candidates who would largely pay their way and exercise a degree of traditional influence in their localities", pp. 47–48.

[86] This is a quote from Dr Rajan, a Madras Congress leader cited by B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress*, pp. 76–77. Tomlinson goes on to give two examples from the UP in corroboration of this statement (*a*) Keshav Chandra Singh of Banda District who had been a member of the anti-Congress faction of the UP Hindu Sabha; and (*b*) Jagannath Prasad Agarwal of Sitapur who had until 1936 been a supporter of Raja Maheshwar Dayal Seth, a landlord leader.

[87] *PAI UP*, No. 3/1937, for week ending 16 January, pp. 72–73.

[88] *Ibid*. The Shahjahanpur evidence comes from *PAI UP*, No. 4, 1937, p. 100. Sri Prakasa, a prominent Allahabad Congressman had lamented, in a letter to Nehru on 5 September 1936, "Many persons are anxious to go (into the Legislature) and are deserving also but who want financial assistance". *JN Papers*, Part I, Vol. 96, p. 69.

providing active help[89] and a *taluqdar* was himself a candidate from Unnao,[90] most Congress candidates were heavily dependent on local sources and the Congress for funds. In Fatehpur, Babu Bansgopal was believed to have even borrowed money from moneylenders for his election campaign! In eastern UP, most candidates relied on the Congress for monetary help. The only exception was Ballia where the candidates were both well-to-do men.[91] In some cases as in Gonda the candidates at first refused to contest as they could not afford the expenses. They were then provided with funds by the Central Parliamentary Board. Thus, in many cases the problem of election expenses did not prevent poorer Congressmen from contesting elections. The UPCC had heavily overdrawn from its own resources to finance the elections and later found itself with a deficit of Rs 35,000–40,000.[92] Quite obviously, unlike in Bihar, there were no major capitalists to finance the UP election campaign. However, small millowners, especially those owning sugar factories provided some assistance. So had shopkeepers and merchants—some openly and others secretly.[93]

How sound were the credentials of those who contested the elections on the Congress ticket? Barring a couple of districts, at least one candidate (and sometimes more) from each district was a major district-level Congress leader. Ram Chandra Paliwal of Agra, Bans Gopal of Fatehpur, B.D. Dhulekar of Jhansi, Kamlapati Tripathi of Benares, Dr Murari Lal of Kanpur, Shibban Lal Saksena of Gorakhpur, Pandit Algu Rai Shastri and Sita Ram Asthana of Azamgarh, Pandit B.D. Tripathi and Jata Shankar Shukla of Unnao, Gopinath Srivastava from Lucknow, Pandit Shanti Swarup of Hardoi, Munshi Iswar Saran of Gonda, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Ranjit Pandit of Allahabad, are just a few names. They had all been organizers of the Civil Disobedience campaign in their districts, many had been in the Congress since the days of the Non-Cooperation

[89] In Bahraich, Thakur Asghar Ali Khan, *taluqdar* of Tipera had paid the expenses of cars for electioneering work. In Pratapgarh, the *taluqdar* of Bhadri was supporting the Congress candidates. *PAI UP*, No. 4/1937, p. 97.

[90] The Lal Saheb of Semri.

[91] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1937, p. 97. One of the candidates was Thakur Suraj Narain Singh and the other Thakur Radha Mohan Singh.

[92] UPCC Circular issued on 27 June 1937. *AICC*/P-20 (Part I)/1937, p. 375.

[93] In Banda, merchants were reported to have contributed covertly, *PAI UP*, No. 3/1937, 9–16 January 1937.

Movement; some were also Kisan/labour leaders in their areas. Some prominent Congressmen contested elections from places other than their home constituencies: thus Mohanlal Gautam, the Aligarh Congressman, stood from Gorakhpur and Pandit Venkatesh Narain Tiwari, the Allahabad Congressman, from Kanpur and Uma Nehru from Farrukhabad District. Practically all the Congressmen contesting from the urban constituencies were well known nationalist leaders.[94]

There is no denying the predominance of members from socially dominant castes. But this was no more than a reflection of the character of the Congress leadership, even in rural areas at this time. Those who were *Thakurs* and Brahmans by caste certainly predominated in the leadership. This was not surprising, as they constituted the traditional intelligentsia in India and had sacrificed their careers in the cause of freedom. Such a leadership has, in varying historical contexts, led popular movements in different parts of the world. Besides their education and sacrifices, they were popularly regarded as the natural leaders of society. This aspect has, in our view, been often misrepresented. Instead of dismissing such a leadership as exploitative, owing to its class origin, it would be more meaningful to study the behaviour of these dominant caste leaders towards the lower castes in the context of the national movement. In other words, did their participating in the movement remove their caste prejudices if any, or were they perpetuated?

In the UP, the Congress election campaign focussed on two main issues: opposition to the landlords and their parties, the National Agriculturist Party of Agra and the National Agriculturist Party of Oudh (henceforth NAPA and NAPO), and determination to oust the British from India. Significantly, religion was not used at all in the campaign. Anti-landlord propaganda was of two kinds. One highlighted the role of the landlords as collaborators with the British in ruling India. For instance, the fact that the leader of the NAPA, the Nawab of Chhatari, was in the government in 1930 and had been a party to the victimization of Congress agitators during the Civil Disobedience Movement was highlighted in election

[94] C.B. Gupta, Dr Jawaharlal Rohatgi, P.D. Tandon, Sampurnanand, A.P. Jain, Pyare Lal Sharma, Acharya Jugul Kishore, G.B. Pant and Acharya Narendra Dev. P.D. Reeves, *Elections in Uttar Pradesh*, Delhi, 1975.

speeches.[95] There was also the economic dimension: Kisans were asked to demonstrate their opposition to zamindari oppression by refusing to vote for landlord candidates and by ceasing to pay illegal cesses such as *nazrana* and perform *begar*.[96] Anti-British propaganda took the form of describing the poverty of India—the level of unemployment, the poor conditions of the Kisans—and contrasting this to the exorbitant salaries paid to British officials in India.[97] Some speakers recalled that Indian cooperation in World War I had only earned them the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy.[98] Apparently the tactic adopted was to hold meetings as close to police stations and the camps of government servants as possible "with the double object of annoying Government officials and increasing the prestige of Congress in the eyes of cultivators who would naturally conclude that if the Congress can attack Government and all its doings in this way with impunity under the nose of Government servants, Government must be afraid of it."[99]

During the course of the election campaign, Congress workers were called upon to visit the remotest villages. Often, such visits would be used to open Congress offices in such villages. Sri Krishna Dutt Paliwal of Agra set up a Congress Committee in village Kusmara of Mainpuri District when he went there to address a meeting.[100] In Bikapur police circle, district Fyzabad, Congress workers opened offices in Darbganj, Koncha and Barhupur villages as well as Chaura Bazar in November 1936 as a part of their election campaign.[101] These are but two incidents cited to indicate what was probably a general trend throughout the province.

[95] *PAI UP*, No. 1/1937 for fortnight ending 2 January 1937. See for instance speech by Mohan Lal Saksena in Bareilly.

[96] Election speeches in Gonda and Gorakhpur, *PAI UP*, No. 4/1937, pp. 97–98.

[97] Most of G.B. Pant's speeches were in this vein. See, for example, his speech at Agra, *PAI UP*, No. 1/1937 for fortnight ending 2 January, p. 3.

[98] *Ibid*. Mohanlal Saksena at a Bareilly election meeting in December 1936.

[99] *Home Poll*, 18/1/37, FR UP i.

[100] *PAI UP*, No. 1/1937, pp. 26–27.

[101] *UP Home Police* File 263/1937 Cover II, p. 7. Deputy Commissioner's memo on incidents necessitating posting of additional police at Darabganj P.S. Bikapur District, Fyzabad.

Campaigning was easier in those areas where active organizational work had been undertaken over the preceding two years. Thus, in Gorakhpur, the District Kisan Sangh organized a procession of peasants protesting against the malpractices of zamindari candidates. According to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) reports, such processions attracted much popular sympathy.[102] Indeed, Gorakhpur had a rather impressive record of election meetings—it was calculated that 25 per cent of all the meetings held in the UP between 2–9 January were in Gorakhpur.[103]

Every type of organized body sympathetic to the Congress helped in its election campaign. Thus, branches of the Gandhi Ashram in various parts of the province, the Arya Kumar Sabha and the Mahabir Mandal in Banda were reported to be participants.[104] So too were the Ahrars, especially in western UP.

Congress Socialists were indifferent to the whole campaign and chose, instead, to busy themselves with economic issues such as problems arising out of the reduction of sugar cane prices in Meerut.[105] But in Agra they campaigned for the local candidate through the *Mehtar* union.[106] Swami Sahajanand Saraswati of the All-India Kisan Sabha was also reported to have participated in the election campaign at Ghazipur.[107]

But the prime mover of the Congress election campaign was undoubtedly Nehru, for whom "this was the first of his national campaigns, covering the Indian village network by train, plane, car, bicycle, cart and steamer, on horse, elephant and camel, and on foot".[108] Large crowds assembled to hear his speeches especially in the rural areas. As the UP Chief Secretary observed, even "those persons who did not get near enough to hear the speeches were at least a potential audience."[109]

The people's response to the Congress election campaign was astounding. *The Leader*, a liberal newspaper, observed that "the

[102] *PAI UP*, No. 1/1937, p. 2.

[103] *PAI UP*, No. 2/1937, pp. 41–42.

[104] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1937 for 16–23 January, pp. 91 and 97.

[105] *PAI UP*, No. 5/1937, 24–30 January, p. 134.

[106] *PAI UP*, No. 6/1937, 30 January 6 February, p. 147.

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

[108] S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol. 1, p. 215.

[109] Letter from C.W. Gwynne, Chief Secretary, UP to R.M. Maxwell, Home Secretary, Government of India, *Home Poll*, 4/15/36.99. On an average, several

province seems to have gone election mad".[110] Even before the election results were declared it was amply clear which way the wind was blowing. The impunity with which representatives of the government were attacked revealed that the authorities were little feared.[111] And this was in spite of the preventive action taken by the UP Government under Section 108, Cr. P.C. just before the elections. Congress flags were to be seen all over: according to the UP police the Congress flag was held to be a "symbol of revolution" and "its display does more harm than any number of speeches and meetings".[112] In Lucknow, on election day, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Superintendent of Police (SP), when visiting polling booths, were greeted by "all the old cries common in civil disobedience days".[113] Phulwari Lal, a sugar factory owner in Farrukhabad, announced that he would only buy sugar cane from those who voted for the Congress.[114] Grain merchants of Sitapur levied a Congress tax of one pice per cart on every grain cart entering the city.[115] *Patwaris*, (keepers of land records) schoolteachers and municipal board members all campaigned actively for the Congress.[116] There was no dearth of voluntary workers for the Congress cause. Most campaigners were not paid at all. They moved from village to village, obtaining food from sympathetic households.[117] Sometimes the local Congress would meet the food expenses of such individuals.[118] In a few cases workers were paid Rs 15 to Rs 20 a month for services rendered.[119]

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thousands turned up for meetings; 20,000 turned up for one meeting at Fyzabad. *PAI UP*, No. 3/1937, 9–16 January, p. 71. CID sources stated about Nehru's visit: "It must however, be admitted that he was received everywhere with much enthusiasm and large crowds collected", *PAI UP*, No. 4/1937, 16–23 January, pp. 22–23.

[110] *The Leader*, 21 February 1937, p. 8.

[111] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1937, pp. 91–92. In Unnao, a constable was assaulted. In Hardoi a Deputy Commissioner's tent was pulled down.

[112] *PAI UP*, No. 5/1937 for 24–30 January, p. 129.

[113] *PAI UP*, No. 7/1937, 6–15 February, p. 165.

[114] *PAI UP*, No. 1/1937, for week ending 2 January, p. 1.

[115] *PAI UP*, No. 3/1937 for week ending 16 January.

[116] *AICC*/P-20/1937, p. 447; *PAI UP*, No. 3/1937, p. 179, Proceedings of Commissioner's Conference, May 1937.

[117] *PAI UP*, No. 3/1937.

[118] *Ibid*.

[119] *Ibid*.

Congress workers made use of all kinds of public gatherings for their speeches. Weekly markets and fairs were regularly frequented. Additionally, social gatherings were also utilized. For instance, the gathering at a *nach* (dance) party held as part of the celebrations for the circumcision of a Muslim boy in a village in Ghazipur, was addressed by Congress workers.[120] In Gonda, the widow of a rich *bania* invited 400 members of the community for a feast after the funeral of her husband. Congressmen were present here as well to address the members.[121]

Another noteworthy feature was the large-scale participation of students. Students of the Aligarh Muslim University worked enthusiastically for the Congress-Muslim candidate from Aligarh.[122] At the other end of the province, students of the Benares Hindu University were playing an equally active role.[123] In Bulandshahr, processions were taken out by students of the DAV High School, J.A.S. High School, Khurja and Khurja College in favour of the Congress candidate.[124] In Jhansi too, school and college students participated. The same was true of Meerut. The principal of DAV College, Kanpur, threatened to cancel government scholarships and fee concessions of those students who had participated in the canvassing.[125] There were cases of expulsion in Aligarh and Fyzabad.[126]

The theory that Congress prestige had greatly increased during the election campaign was proved by the election results. Large numbers had turned up to vote for the Congress. Others, who did not apparently want to vote for it, stayed at home and did not exercise their franchise.[127] Most remarkable was the peasantry's support to the Congress. This was in spite of many threats from landlords. Many promised their vote to the zamindars and even made use of conveyance provided by the zamindars' men to reach the election booths, only to vote for Congress candidates.[128] From

[120] *PAI UP*, No. 5/1937, 24–30 January, p. 133.
[121] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1937.
[122] *PAI UP*, No. 7/1937, 6–13 February, p. 176.
[123] *PAI UP*, No. 6/1937, 30 January–6 February, p. 143.
[124] *Ibid*.
[125] *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937, 13–20 February, p. 189.
[126] *Ibid*.
[127] This happened in Aligarh. *PAI UP*, No. 7/1937 for 6–13 February.
[128] *Ibid*.

Rae Bareli we have an interesting story. Congress workers made a fairly good estimate of the number that had voted for the Congress candidate well before the results were declared. This was achieved by a rather ingenious method. The voters had been told to bring along a stalk of hay if they were voting for the Congress. As they went into the polling booth they threw these stalks in a pile nearby. At the end of the day they were counted and then burnt in a final act of celebration.[129] In the Kunda *tahsil* of Pratapgarh, it was reported that on election day voters had brought pieces of dried cow dung with them to the polling stations and these were burnt, symbolizing the destruction of *bedakhli*s (ejectment orders) once and for all.[130]

Landlord prestige was extremely low at the end of the elections. The damage was irreparable. Candidates of the National Agricultural Parties had been given a severe drubbing. They won a mere 25 seats in the UP Legislative Assembly as against the Congress tally of 133. In the 52 member Legislative Council they obtained only six seats. Every act of terror by zamindars/*taluqdars* only drove the peasantry deeper into the Congress ranks. In several districts, zamindars tried to take revenge on their tenants who had voted for the Congress.[131]

Government hegemony was also eroded to some extent due to the elections. While the election campaign was on, the police could do nothing to curb anti-British speeches besides the action taken under Section 108 Cr.P.C. just before the elections. The CID lamented that "many persons seem to think that Government is either afraid to do anything against Congress or is indifferent to its success".[132] *Patwaris*, municipal board members, *mukhias* (village headmen) and government servants had canvassed for Congress candidates.[133] In the post-election period this trend was not

[129] Interview with Ramakant Pandey, Rae Bareli, April 1986.

[130] *Home Poll*, 18/2/37, FR UP ii.

[131] *PAI UP*, No. 7/1937, 6–13 February, p. 170, No. 9/1937 for 20–27 February, p. 197 for Etah. No. 11/1937, p. 226, 13–20 March for Fyzabad.

[132] These complaints came from Aligarh and Jhansi. *PAI UP*, No. 6/1937, 31 January–6 February, p. 147 and *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937, 13–20 February, p. 181, respectively.

[133] For Agra see *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937, 13–20 February, p. 185. In Mainpuri a post-master had worked for the Congress, *PAI UP*, No. 7/1937, 6–13 February, p. 173.

reversed—rather, it became more pronounced. At a meeting addressed by Pandit G.B. Pant in Naini Tal, for instance, "subordinatory government officials and pensioners" were, according to the CID, "as much in evidence as Congressmen".[134]

Though the Congress task of rebuilding the organization was made much easier after the elections, there was also an unsavoury side. There had been a lot of bickering over the selection of candidates—the choice of candidates was not welcome to all. And in an alarming number of places, rival candidates had surfaced.[135] All of Nehru's efforts at persuading them to step down were of no avail. After the elections, the PCC had to take disciplinary action against such individuals in nine districts. In some cases, they were debarred from becoming primary members of the Congress for two years and could not become elective members for another period of one to three years.[136] This was certainly not a happy augury for an organization supposedly indifferent to Council entry! Not all the rival candidates were power-hungry, though. Being chosen as a Congress candidate was a mark of recognition of one's nationalist fervour and there were many claimants to that position in each district.

One rather heartening feature of the election campaign was the comparative lack of communal feeling. Both the Congress and Muslim League manifestos had expressed reservations about the 1935 Act in their own different ways. The Muslim League had resolved to work the Act for whatever little it was worth, whereas

[134] *PAI UP*, No. 16/1937, for 17–24 April, p. 301.

[135] In Kanpur, Raghubar Dayal who was backed by the CSP, opposed Jawaharlal Rohatgi, the official Congress candidate. Consequently the election campaign in this area was seriously impaired. *PAI UP*, No. 5/1937 31 January–6 February, p. 117. In Benares, Sampurnanand was opposed by Jhingan Sahu. *PAI UP*, No. 2/1937, 2–9 January, pp. 41–42. In Mathura, it was the President of the DCC, Hakim Brijlal Varman who opposed the official candidate Sheomangal Singh. *PAI UP*, No. 11/1937, 13–20 March, p. 226. Here, however, one feels that Hakim Brijlal Varman as a prominent Congress leader of the district, should have been given a ticket. In Jhansi, it was alleged that the 'workers' candidate had been ignored by the Congress. *PAI UP*, No. 10/1937, upto 6 March, pp. 217–18.

[136] *AICC*/P-20/1937, pp. 549–51. The nine districts were: Lucknow (1); Pratapgarh (7); Banda (2); Benares (10); Fyzabad (3); Kanpur (16); Allahabad (2); Barabanki (1); Farrukhabad (1). Thus, action was taken against a total number of 43 Congressmen.

Congress was committed to wrecking it.[137] On other points also there were fairly major differences—for instance, the Muslim League had virtually no agrarian programme to speak of and clearly stated that it was "opposed to any movement that aims at expropriation of private property".[138] The Congress Manifesto spelled out its agrarian programme in detail.[139]

Still there was a great deal of cooperation between the Congress and League members. Two specific instances will suffice to indicate the extent of this cooperation. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, the redoubtable fund raiser of the Congress, gave Rs 5,000 to the Muslim League candidate from Allahabad to fight the election against his NAP rival.[140] (It may be recalled that the UPCC had only provided a paltry Rs 150 for the Congress election campaign at Allahabad.)[141] Congress meetings, especially those addressed by Jawaharlal Nehru, were often attended by Muslims.[142] Congressmen also campaigned for Muslim League candidates.[143] The amity remained even after the elections. In Ballia, for instance, joint victory

[137] "The League considers that, having regard to the conditions prevailing at present in country, the provincial scheme of the constitution be utilized for what it is worth...." Extract from Muslim League Election Manifesto, 11 June 1936, Khursheed Kamal, ed., *A Documentary Record of the Congress Government 1937–39*, Vol. 1, Delhi, 1988, p. 41. The Congress in its election manifesto rejected "in its entirety the constitution imposed upon India by the new Act." Extract from the Congress Election Manifesto, 22 August 1936, *SWJN*, Vol. 7, p. 460.

[138] Khursheed Kamal, *A Documentary Record of the Congress Government*, Vol. 1, p. 44.

[139] "It [the Congress] stands for a reform of the system of land tenure and revenue and rent and an equitable adjustment of the burden on agricultural land, giving immediate relief to the peasantry by a substantial reduction of agricultural rent and revenue now paid by them and exempting uneconomic holdings from payment of rent and revenue. *SWJN*, Vol. 7, p. 461.

[140] *PAI UP*, No. 2/1937, 2–9 January, pp. 41–42.

[141] *PAI UP*, No. 3/1937, 9–16 January, p. 75.

[142] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1937, 16–23 January, pp. 2–3.

[143] For example, Husain Ahmed Madni spoke in favour of the Muslim League candidate at Gonda, *PAI UP*, No. 4/1937, 16–23 January, p. 104. Jawaharlal Nehru himself wrote to Rajendra Prasad: "During my tours where there was no Congress Muslim candidate, I usually supported the League candidate if he was not an obvious reactionary...." Letter dated 21 July 1937, *JN papers*, Vol. 85, pp. 34–41.

processions were taken out for the Congress and Muslim League candidates.[144]

All this could not, however, make up for the serious deficiencies on the communal front, which remained. Separate electorates denied the Congress an invaluable opportunity to mobilize Muslims. Muslims stood from separate constituencies created for them. Hence less effort was made to draw Muslims to general Congress meetings. The fact that few Congressmen stood from the Muslim constituencies meant that there was less incentive to do active propaganda work in such areas. The wave of enthusiasm generated during the elections Left Muslims by and large untouched, since they could not vote along with their Hindu neighbours for the same candidates from the same constituencies.

February–July 1937: Consolidating the Election Gains

During the elections, normal Congress activity was suspended. Once the results were declared, however, Congress wasted no time in consolidating its gains. The newly-elected legislators showed great concern for their constituencies. For instance, in Rae Bareli it was announced by beat of drum that all cases of oppression by zamindars should be brought to the notice of the Congress MLA, Lakshmi Shankar Bajpai.[145] The election campaign had generated a certain momentum. Congress offices were opened in several new areas. The directive from the AICC was that the organizational network should reach every village and town.[146] Many Congress offices had been set up in the vicinity of polling booths.[147] Now, after the elections, groups of such village-level offices were clubbed together under one Mandal Congress office. Mandal Congress organizations replaced the earlier *tahsil*-level Congress offices.

Rae Bareli was in the forefront of organizational activity in this period. A Congress Enquiry Committee (which included Kalka

[144] *PAI UP*, No. 9/1937, for 20–27 February, p. 195.

[145] *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937 for 13–20 February, p. 185.

[146] *AICC*/G-30(a)1937 "Congress Organisation and its Contact with the Masses".

[147] *Home Police*, 263/1937. Also *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937, p. 181.

Prasad, a prominent district-level Congress and Kisan leader) was set up in this district to investigate Kisan complaints.[148] By mid-February there was already some talk of forming panchayats, the earliest attempts at a parallel administration.[149] Meanwhile, in neighbouring Sultanpur, panchayats were actually set up in the third week of February. Barely four weeks after, the CID reported that 10 such panchayats were functional in Sultanpur.[150] Rae Bareli also reported cases of non-payment of rent by Kisans.[151] The expectation was that Congress would soon form a government which would remit these payments.[152] (Incidentally, this hope was shared by peasants in other districts as well, for example, Allahabad.)[153] The Kisans of this district had bitter memories of struggle against landlords: hence they decided to boycott all those who had voted for the *taluqdar* candidates.[154] Meanwhile, in neighbouring Pratapgarh, the Kisan leader Baba Ramchandra was reportedly opening Congress offices to collect information on high-handed behaviour by landlords against tenants during the elections.[155] Similar developments were reported from several other districts.[156]

In the post-election period, it became a common practice to exaggerate the importance of the newly elected Congress MLAs. A Hardoi speaker explained that the local MLA was as powerful as the collector.[157] Another Congress worker in Basti assured the people that they need no longer be afraid of the police and the collector, since their MLA had the power to inspect *thana*s (police stations) and the collectorate office.[158] This was the first moment at which structures of British power were sought to be superseded by the Congress. There were stories of policemen having been transferred after Congressmen complained about their

[148] *PAI UP*, No. 9/1937, 20–27 February, p. 197.
[149] *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937, 13–20 February, p. 185.
[150] *PAI UP*, No. 9/1937, 20–27 February, p. 197.
[151] *PAI UP*, No. 12/1937, 20–27 March, p. 236.
[152] *PAI UP*, No. 7/1937, p. 174.
[153] *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937, p. 185.
[154] *PAI UP*, No. 7/1937, 6–13 February, p. 174.
[155] *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937, p. 185.
[156] Pilibhit—*PAI UP*, No. 9/1937, p. 197; Sultanpur—*Ibid*.; Bulandshahr—*PAI UP*, No. 10/1937, 27 February–6 March, p. 213; Etah, Etawah, Gorakhpur, Jaunpur, Jhansi, Kheri—*Ibid*.
[157] *PAI UP*, No. 10/1937, 27 February–6 March, p. 208.
[158] *Ibid*.

behaviour.[159] In Shahjahanpur three interesting rumours had been floated: (*a*) that the Inspector General (IG) had been removed; (*b*) policemen would shortly be given *khadi* uniforms; (*c*) the Congress flag would be flown on all police stations.[160] Basti Congress speakers said at a meeting that no one should be afraid of the red turbans as the Superintendent of Police (SP) and magistrates had been transferred to Congress and could be dismissed by them.[161]

There was a certain vagueness about what would happen in the immediate future. Rae Bareli Congressmen evidently believed that another election would take place within the next six months.[162] But the disturbing question was: what would happen thereafter? Many Congress MLAs found themselves making promises that they would remove the grievances of peasants once ministries were formed. This presupposed the acceptance of office and formation of ministries. The logic of the situation was beginning to assert itself.

On 7 March 1937, the UPCC had a meeting at Lucknow to discuss the office acceptance issue. At the beginning of the meeting it seemed that the decision would be in favour of accepting office. Twenty-eight District Congress Committees had voted this way—only 10 had opposed the move.[163] Vehement speeches and debates on office acceptance had marked meetings organized by the CSP in Allahabad and Lucknow.[164] But the tide turned after Jawaharlal Nehru, Z.A. Ahmed and Purshottamdas Tandon spoke convincingly on the evils of ministry formation. Consequently, when a vote was taken after a four-hour long heated discussion, 71 members were against office acceptance and 41 in favour.[165] Nevertheless local-level speeches continued to be ambiguous. In some areas,

[159] From Rae Bareli, Village Gurbakshganj, P.S. Salon, *Ibid*.

[160] *PAI UP*, No. 11/1937, 15–20 March, p. 223.

[161] *PAI UP*, No. 12/1937, 20–27 March, p. 236.

[162] *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937, 13–20 February, p. 181.

[163] *PAI UP*, No. 10/1937, 27 February–6 March, pp. 210–12.

[164] At Allahabad, a meeting was held on 3 March at Swaraj Bhawan. While J.B. Kripalani and K.N. Katju spoke in favour of office acceptance, Dr Ashraf, Z.A. Ahmed and Acharya Narendra Dev spoke against it. The final vote was against acceptance of office. *PAI UP*, No. 10/1937, p. 212. In Lucknow, the meeting was held at Amin-ud-daula Park and the decision was the same, *Ibid*.

[165] *The Leader*, 9 March 1937, p. 1.

there was the continued expectation of a Congress assumption of office in the near future.[166] In others, the refrain was that Congress would soon create a deadlock and a fresh election would be called within the next six months.[167] However, the AICC session later in the month passed a resolution favouring office acceptance, provided necessary assurances were given by the British Government.[168]

The Congress *hartal* (strike) on 1 April 1937 against the 1935 Act, which was to come into effect on that day, was a near total success in the UP. Most remarkable was the Muslim participation in this protest against the new constitution: save for five districts—Fatehpur and Meerut where Muslims did not participate and Rae Bareli, Shahjahanpur and Budaun where Muslim participation was marginal—the response was heartening. In Pratapgarh, no cows were slaughtered on that day. Muslim shopkeepers in several districts closed their shops, sometimes on their own (as in Aligarh), sometimes after being persuaded by Ahrars (Ghazipur), Jamiat-ul-Ulema representatives (Benares) or local Congressmen (Gonda). At Allahabad and Kanpur the Muslim League made feeble attempts to oppose observance of the *hartal*.[169]

The *hartal* was, however, a largely urban phenomenon. Besides closure of shops, speeches by Congressmen, major and minor, marked the observance.[170] Communists and other Left leaders were more active on 1 April than during the election campaign.[171] There were a few instances of rural participation as well. Both in Sultanpur and Pratapgarh, Kisans kept away from tending their fields. In Pratapgarh, it was reported that Kisans did not even take their morning meals and starved their cattle. In Kumaon division, no

[166] *PAI UP*, No. 11/1937, for fortnight ending 20 March, p. 224. The speech was made in Shahjahanpur.

[167] *PAI UP*, No. 16/1937, 17–24 April, p. 304. The occasion was the visit of a Congressman from the Central Provinces to Chirgaon, Jhansi.

[168] This resolution was moved by Rajendra Prasad and got 135 votes. An amendment from the socialist side demanding total rejection of office was defeated. B.N. Pande, ed., *A Centenary History of the Indian National Congress 1885–1985* (henceforth *A Centenary History*), Vol. 3, New Delhi, 1985, p. 146.

[169] *PAI UP*, No. 13/1937, 27 March–3 April, pp. 225–65.

[170] Maulana Azad and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan were the main speakers from outside the Province. *Ibid*.

[171] Sant Singh Yusuf spoke in Bareilly; Ramesh Chandra Sinha in Allahabad. *Ibid*. Balkrishna Sharma in Kanpur, Algu Rai Shastri in Meerut. *PAI UP*, No. 14/1937, 3–10 April, p. 273.

lorries plied on the road between Kotdwara and Dogadda. Traffic was also stopped on this day on the Meerut–Bulandshahr and the Delhi–Bulandshahr roads. In Basti, Congress workers succeeded in persuading some bullock-cart owners not to sell sugar cane to millowners. In Sindhauli (Shahjahanpur District) sugar mills were closed on 1 April.[172]

Enthusiasm also marked the customary celebrations of National Week (from 6–13 April) in 1937. *Prabhat pheri*s (morning processions), flag salutation ceremonies and meetings commemorating the Jallianwala Bagh massacre were held in abundance. Invariably, when recalling Jallianwalla Bagh, speakers would get emotional and hurl abuses at the British Government.[173] The refusal by the Governors to give the necessary assurances to Congress for accepting office[174] was cited as yet another example of British injustice. The Leftists gave the celebration a new tinge by organizing Kisan meetings and processions.[175] The pace of panchayat-formation was also greatly accelerated in the course of this week.[176]

Congress panchayats were not a new phenomenon. During the preparations for the Civil Disobedience campaign and in its course such panchayats had mushroomed all over the province.[177]

[172] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[173] For instance, Shibbanlal Saksena spoke in Kanpur. He said that the Government which caused such incidents like Jallianwala Bagh must be destroyed. In Bareilly a certain Deo Chandra Narayan said that if Ravan was to blame for oppressing Sita and if Duryodhan was to blame for pulling off Draupadi's dhoti, the British Government was to blame for oppressing the unarmed people of Jallianwala Bagh. *PAI UP*, No. 15/1937, for 10–17 April, p. 288.

[174] These assurances "that the Governor will not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of ministers in regard to constitutional activities" had been demanded as per the AICC decision at its Delhi session on 17 and 18 March 1937, *Indian National Congress Resolutions, 1936–37* (henceforth *INC Resolutions*), pp. 11–12.

[175] *Ibid.* A thousand Kisans marched from Pratapgarh to Allahabad on 12 April. A number of Kisan processions were reported from Kanpur. Two Kisans were agitated because hailstorms had destroyed their crops. They shouted: "We are hungry, give us bread"; "Give fodder to the cattle and remit our rent". *PAI UP*, No. 14/1937, 3–10 April, p. 275.

[176] 15 panchayats were formed in Fyzabad, 31 in Pratapgarh. *PAI UP*, No. 15/1937, 10–17 April, p. 294.

[177] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, pp. 41, 174, 179.

In 1937–38, however, it was in central UP (Fyzabad, Sultanpur, Rae Bareli, Pratapgarh and Kanpur) that these local decision-making bodies abounded. In western UP they were a rarity—the only reports being from Aligarh (village Shahpur, P.S. Sikandra Rao) and Etawah (Jalalpur, P.S. Bela and Naugawan).[178] Peasants were advised to take their problems to these panchayats and not to the local police.[179] The British authorities obviously regarded these panchayats as a challenge to their authority. This is evident from the care taken by intelligence sources to record every action of these panchayats in minute detail.

In the summer of 1937, itinerant Congress workers toured the villages, spreading the Congress message. Local sympathizers were asked to keep aside some grain to feed such workers, whose duties included the reading out of newspapers to villagers. They were also required to act as the local watch-and-ward system ensuring that "there was no harassment by zamindars and police".[180]

After the hectic activity of April, there was a lull in May. But by June Congress work picked up with district after district holding political conferences. It became a common practice to have a special Kisan conference on the same premises immediately after the political conference was concluded. It was also the pattern to have larger numbers of non-Socialist Congressmen at the former and a preponderance of left-wingers at the latter. Besides these district conferences, *tahsil*-level conferences were also organized.

Yet, not every District Congress Committee (DCC) had the wherewithal to organize these conferences. Despite the growing support for the Congress, financial problems continued to dog the organization. From at least two districts, Agra and Mathura, there were reports of district conferences having been postponed due to the inadequacy of funds.[181] (Significantly, in both places there were rivalries and conflicts within the Congress.)

[178] *PAI UP*, No. 22/1937, 29 May–5 June, p. 391 and *PAI UP*, No. 25/1937, 19–26 June, p. 472. The panchayat in Naugawan even fined a few people for not having participated in the *hartal* of 1 April.

[179] *PAI UP*, No. 16/1937, 17–24 April, pp. 301 and 304.

[180] Instructions to a Basti audience by Sita Ram Shukla (*PAI UP*, No. 15/1937, 10–17 April, p. 286). In Shahjahanpur leaders of a procession in Bamiana Village, P.S. Khundanganj, stopped frequently on the way to tell the onlookers to give five seers of grain each to the Congress office.

[181] *PAI UP*, No. 23/1937, 5–12 June, p. 411 for Mathura; *PAI UP*, No. 26/1937, 26 June–3 July p. 489 and *PAI UP*, No. 20/1937, 15–22 May, p. 356, for Agra.

Ideological differences and factional disputes were beginning to surface in other districts as well. In Rae Bareli the Congress was neatly split into followers of two individuals both well-respected in the district. Kalka Prasad was a peasant leader of long standing who had basic differences with the Lal Saheb of Semri, the other leader, a *taluqdar* and now a Congress MLA. The latter's *taluqdari* status irked Kalka Prasad who insisted that the Lal Saheb had no business to be in the Congress. In this district, the district political conference was held simultaneously with the Kisan conference. While the former was held at the Kothi of the Lal Saheb of Semri, the latter organized by Kalka Prasad was held at Munshiganj on the outskirts of Rae Bareli town and famous for a firing incident during the Non-Cooperation Movement. Both groups sent their respective emissaries to meet Swami Sahajanand who chose to attend the Munshiganj meeting, thereby giving it greater legitimacy. Each group condemned the other for holding a separate meeting.[182]

In Meerut, Congressmen were hostile towards and suspicious of Kisan Sabha workers. They felt that the Sabha was using the Congress to carry on its own propaganda. The two groups clashed at a village level meeting on 13 June, when the Kisan Sabha wanted to hoist a red flag and Congressmen insisted on the national flag.[183]

The issue of Congress–Kisan Sabha relations has been dealt with in another chapter and we shall therefore not expand on it here. What is of relevance, however, is that, despite these occasional quarrels, the pre-ministry phase of Congress activity was generally characterized by cordial relations between the Congress Left and the Right. Both could express their different, often conflicting points of view freely. The Meerut District Political Conference, held at Mowana on 24 and 25 May, provides a good example. K.M. Ashraf, an invitee, aired his pro-Communist views freely. On the other hand there were speakers who argued for the superiority of non-violence over violence. Chaudhury Vijaypal Singh, the local member of the Legislative Assembly, even put forward a resolution to the effect that Congress had made a mistake by not accepting office.[184] At an Allahabad Town Congress Committee (TCC)

[182] *PAI UP*, No. 24/1937, 12–19 June, p. 490.
[183] *Ibid*.
[184] *PAI UP*, No. 22/1937, 29 May–5 June, p. 392.

meeting a confirmed right-winger like J.B. Kripalani could speak along with the ex-terrorist Bhupendra Nath Sanyal and a Congress Socialist like Rammanohar Lohia in support of Sachindra Nath Bakshi's hunger-strike.[185] At the third session of the Eastern India Railwaymen's Conference held in Lucknow from 12–14 June, C.B. Gupta as well as Mohanlal Saksena played an active role, besides Socialists like Acharya Narendra Dev and Communists like Sant Singh Yusuf.[186]

Within the Left camp as well, there was general peace. But the strain of different ideologies trying to work harmoniously under the United Front banner would occasionally surface. We may take the proceedings of the UP Provincial Youth Conference, held in Sitapur on 29 and 30 May as an example, where major Left leaders such as M.N. Roy and Acharya Narendra Dev were present. This conference could transact little business because it got bogged down in Royist–Communist wrangles. From the Royist camp Bhupendra Nath Sanyal moved a resolution declaring Congress to be the only effective anti-imperialist organization in the country. This was most objectionable for the Communists who did not want so much importance to be given to the Congress. The latter, in turn moved a resolution urging that labour and peasant organizations be affiliated to the Congress on a collective basis. The resolution was opposed by the Royists.[187]

Left wingers devoted a great deal of their time to the students. After their spirited participation in electioneering, students had ceased to take much interest in political activity. Perhaps the large number of expulsions and punitive measures taken by the authorities in the wake of the election campaign had a deterrent effect. (There was one notable exception though—students of the nationalist Kashi Vidyapith attended all local political meetings in sizable numbers.)[188] Radical leaders were alarmed at this diffidence and tried to shake the students out of their torpor.[189] They had some

[185] *PAI UP*, No. 24/1937, 12–19 June, p. 431.

[186] *Ibid*., pp. 454–55.

[187] *PAI UP*, No. 22/1937 for 29 May–5 June, pp. 403–7.

[188] About 30 students and some professors from the Kashi Vidyapith attended the Second Benares *Tahsil* Political Conference held on 27 June. *PAI UP*, No. 26/1937, 26 June–3 July, p. 488.

[189] See for instance, speeches of Sampurnanand and Beni Madho Tiwari at Jalaun, 3 June. *PAI UP*, No. 22/1937, 29 May–5 June, p. 402.

success: as part of the 1 April *hartal*, "a fair number of students absented themselves from schools".[190] Attempts were made to create branches of the All-India Students Federation (AISF) in the province by getting local student unions to affiliate themselves to the Federation.[191] In Unnao a Navyuwak Sangh had come into existence in the first half of 1937 under the leadership of Pandit Bishambhar Dayal Tripathi, a major Kisan leader of the district.[192]

No assessment of the pre-office acceptance phase would be complete without taking into consideration the Muslim mass contact campaign.[193] This campaign was Nehru's brainchild, intended as a remedy for the poor performance of Congressmen in the Muslim constituencies.[194] One of the first moves in the campaign was to throw all available resources into the Bundelkhand by-election of June–July 1937. The Congress candidate, N.A.K. Sherwani, was pitted against a local Muslim Leaguer, Rafiuddin. Sherwani lost the election but got a sizable number of votes. Behind the campaign lay Nehru's firm conviction that if the Muslims were mobilized on economic issues (which were of equal concern to men and women of all religious groups) they would move closer to the Congress than to parties like the Muslim League.[195] In other words, it was hoped that Muslims would join the Kisan Sabhas, trade unions and also the Congress in large numbers.[196]

[190] *PAI UP*, No. 13/1937, 27 March–3 April, pp. 253–54.

[191] *Ibid*. M.R. Masani, a Socialist, advised Almora students to get their union affiliated to the AISF.

[192] *Ibid*., p. 398.

[193] The decision to form Muslim mass contact committees had been taken at the Congress Working Committee meeting on 27–28 February 1937. See Mushirul Hasan, "The Muslim Mass Contact Campaign: Analysis of a Strategy of Political Mobilization" in *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*, Delhi, 1993, p. 134.

[194] See "The Need for Greater Contact with Muslims", Circular sent by Nehru to the PCCs, 31 March 1937, *SWJN*, Vol. 8, pp. 122–24.

[195] See Nehru's "On the Result of the Bundelkhand by-election" Statement to the Press, Allahabad, 25 July 1937: "Our propaganda was purely political and economic and we saw how even in a backward area we could make substantial progress in spite of communal and religious cries. This is full of hope for the Congress...." *SWJN*, Vol. 8, p. 172.

[196] It may be mentioned here that Muslims had since the beginning of the 1930s, played an important role in the Kanpur labour movement. Chitra Joshi, in her study of Kanpur textile labour observes that they were largely in the

But Nehru's suggestions would only work slowly over a period of time. Meanwhile, it was felt that some immediate results must be shown for which expeditious methods would have to be resorted to. The Muslim mass contact campaign was begun in April 1937. The large-scale participation of Muslims in the *hartal* of that day may be considered as part of the effort. In May 1937, a two-day meeting of Congress Muslims from the UP and elsewhere was held at Allahabad to chalk out the programme of Muslim mass contact. Funds for this effort were to be provided by the AICC. A Muslim *Ijara* (Muslim Congress Board) was to be constituted. Members of the Muslim League would be requested to resign and join the Congress.[197]

The first step towards implementation of the scheme was a concerted membership drive amongst the Muslims. Though district mass contact committees had members from all communities,[198] enrolment of Muslim primary members was to be carried out by Muslim Congressmen alone. Thus, the Allahabad DCC equipped all its Muslim Congress members with membership forms for the task.[199] At a subsequent meeting on 27 May the point that only Muslim workers should enroll Muslims was reiterated.[200]

The next step was to send out prominent Muslim Congressmen to address special mass contact meetings in different parts of the province. In Allahabad, an attempt was made to set up Muslim

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Communist section of the labour movement, which was opposed to the Mazdoor Sabha. She explains this development in terms of a conjuncture in 1931. On the one hand Muslims were alienated from the Mazdoor Sabha after the 1931 communal riots in Kanpur. On the other, the Communists were at the same time, seeking to get a foothold in the Kanpur labour movement. Thus, Muslims formed the backbone of the Communist labour movement in its early stages. Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and its Forgotten Histories*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 264. After 1936, the two groups were functioning together, which would be tantamount to Muslims rejoining the mainstream of the labour movement.

[197] *PAI UP*, No. 20/1937, 15–22 May, pp. 356–57.

[198] For instance, Ram Krishna Khattri and Har Prasad Saksena were also members of the Lucknow Mass Contacts Committee which was headed by Daya Kishan Ganjoor. *PAI UP*, No. 21/1937, p. 373.

[199] *PAI UP*, No. 20/1937, 15–22 May, p. 356.

[200] *PAI UP*, No. 21/1937, p. 372.

Congress Committees in each *mohalla* (ward) and to then hold meetings.[201] Sajjad Zaheer, K.M. Ashraf, Manzar Ali Sokhta and Maulana Husain Ahmed Madni (a leader of the Jamaiat-ul-Islam and an influential Congressman from Deoband) were the obvious choices.[202] K.M. Ashraf, who had been put in charge of the whole effort, toured extensively.[203] In some places he would appeal to the Muslim peasants to attend their district political conference.[204] Most of his speeches were made in the districts of western UP.[205]

Besides these leaders, there were some local level workers as well: such as Nizamuddin of Jaunpur who concentrated on the eastern districts, that is, Ghazipur, Azamgarh and Jaunpur. In his speech at the Ghazipur Town Hall on 18 May he emphasized two points: (*a*) that Muslim countries were suffering at the hands of the British and (*b*) Jinnah was misleading the Muslims.[206] Another such figure was Mufti Saghir Ahmed, a recent entrant to the Congress who undertook propaganda on behalf of the Congress in and around Jhansi.[207] In Aligarh, there was an AMU student, Abdul Hafiz who had, in response to the Congress appeal, resigned from the Muslim League and thereafter taken keen interest in enroling Muslims for the Congress.[208] A conscious attempt was made to bring out Congress pamphlets in Urdu. It was also the practice at every district political conference held during these months, to pass a resolution calling upon Muslims to join the Congress.[209] In Unnao the Congress organized meetings to celebrate the birth of

[201] *PAI UP*, No. 23/1937, 5–12 June, p. 410.

[202] *PAI UP*, No. 22/1937, pp. 388 and 396.

[203] But in Aligarh he alienated the Ahrars by his outspoken remarks against "prominent Muhammadans" of the district. The Ahrar leader Wahidullah openly attacked Ashraf for his statements. *PAI UP*, No. 21/1937, 22–29 May, p. 372.

[204] *Ibid.*, p. 373.

[205] For example, Meerut, Aligarh, Agra. *PAI UP*, No. 24/1937, 12–18 June, pp. 433–34.

[206] *PAI UP*, No. 20/1937, 15–22 May, p. 358.

[207] *Ibid.*, p. 357.

[208] *PAI UP*, No. 22/1937, 29 May–5 June, p. 388.

[209] Benares—*Ibid.*; Azamgarh—*PAI UP*, No. 23/1937, 5–12 June, pp. 414–15; Sitapur—*PAI UP*, No. 24/1937, 12–19 June, p. 446.

Prophet Muhammed. The meetings were addressed by Bishambar Dayal Tripathi.[210]

Such efforts to create confidence amongst Muslims and to make them feel part of the mainstream were laudable. But the fact that these attempts were being made to lure Muslims as Muslims rather than as fellow-nationalists was unsatisfactory. It also went against Nehru's own pronouncement that the Congress did not think of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians "as religious units but as suffering units of the hungry Indian masses who cry loudly for succour".[211]

The response from the Muslims to the mass contact campaign was lukewarm. The campaign itself was not spread evenly throughout the Province: while western UP got more than its fair share of attention, the effort in eastern UP was rather localized. As for the Oudh districts, with the exceptions of Pratapgarh and Lucknow, we find no evidence of mass contact activity at all. Moreover, Kisan meetings, of which there were several in these early months, were not used to promote the Muslim mass contact campaign. This was probably because such meetings were not considered part of mainstream Congress activity. The Leftists were not unduly alarmed by the Congress' low credibility amongst Muslims. They seem to have shared Jawaharlal Nehru's optimism about the communal problem, that is, that it would automatically disappear when economic issues were brought to the forefront.

The office-acceptance issue once again surfaced in June 1937, though in a sporadic rather than a generalized manner. Indeed, formation of ministries no longer seemed an issue to be debated; it was seen as a near certainty.[212] The logic of the situation, which

[210] *PAI UP*, No. 23/1937, 5–12 June, p. 411.

[211] "The Congress and the Muslims", Press statement, 25 April 1937, *SWJN*, Vol. 8, p. 127.

[212] From Hathras, Aligarh, it was reported that local Congressmen were pleased at the "brighter prospect of Congress accepting office". *PAI UP*, No. 24/1937, 12–19 June, p. 434. In June, Ram Krishna Khattri, an ex-Kakori prisoner requested Sachindra Nath Bakshi to give up the hunger strike in Naini Central Jail "at least for three months, until Congress formed a Ministry". *PAI UP*, No. 25/1937, for 19–26 June, p. 481. Almost at the same time J.B. Kripalani, speaking at a Mohalla Ward Committee meeting at Allahabad, cited the example of Britain, where "a democratic government could force

we had earlier observed soon after the elections, seemed irreversible. Perhaps in an effort to urge the decision on, the British authorities from June onwards undertook a series of arrests of left-wing Congressmen. Many prominent leaders such as B.D. Tripathi, Sajjad Zaheer, Baba Raghav Das of Gorakhpur and Ram Dulare Trivedi of Fyzabad were arrested. Many others were prosecuted.[213] These arrests were perhaps meant to indicate to the Congress that if it did not accept office soon, repression would be its lot. Along with these arrests, however, the authorities were also making efforts to woo the pro-office acceptance group in the Congress. On 22 June 1937, the Viceroy made a statement that the British Government had every desire to cooperate with the Congress in working the 1935 Act.[214]

In response to this semblance of an assurance the Congress on 7 July 1937, announced its decision to form ministries in provinces with Congress majorities. It was with considerable hope of annulling the 1935 Act that the Congress entered the new legislatures.[215] In order to coordinate the Congress work in the legislatures, as early as in March 1937 it had been decided to appoint a Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Congress Working Committee with Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad as its chief members. This sub-committee would "be in close and constant touch with the work of the Congress parties in all the legislatures in the provinces".[216] It was to have 25 members in all to represent the different provinces. Those from the UP were Acharya Narendra

its king to abdicate" to explain the advantages of office-acceptance. *PAI UP*, No. 26/1937, 26 June–3 July, p. 485.

[213] See *PAI UP*, No. 25/1937, 19–26 June, p. 469 for a reference to the arrest of Sajjad Zaheer and p. 475 for arrests of Ram Dulare Trivedi, Baba Raghav Das and Avadhesh Narain Singh.

[214] Statement by Lord Linlithgow, *Linlithgow, Speeches and Statements, 1936–43*, Delhi, 1945, pp. 73–82.

[215] "...office is to be accepted and utilised...to further in every possible way the Congress policy of combating the new Act on the one hand and of prosecuting the constructive programme on the other." Resolution 6 of the Congress Working Committee meeting at Wardha, 5 July 1937, *INC Resolutions 1936–37*, pp. 60–61.

[216] Resolution at the Delhi meeting of the Congress Working Committee, 15–22 March 1937, *INC Resolutions 1936–37*, pp. 47–48.

Dev, Govind Ballabh Pant and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai.[217] After acceptance of office this Committee was incorporated as a department of the AICC which would "keep in touch with the Governments of the six Congress provinces and find out their difficulties and render them help and advice with a view to bring about as much co-ordination between the provinces and the AICC as possible".[218] The work of this Committee was intended to frustrate British hopes of the "provincialization" of the Congress.[219]

[217] *AICC*/E-1/1936–37, pp. 141–43.

[218] Proceedings of the Congress Working Committee meeting at Wardha, 14–15 August 1937, *INC Resolutions 1936–37*, p. 68.

[219] Linlithgow to Zetland, 5 March 1937, *Linlithgow Papers*, F.125/4, p. 63.

TWO

The Working of the Congress Ministry

In spite of its reservations about accepting office, the Congress intended to take legislative activity rather seriously. There was a broad consensus amongst Congressmen on the basic purposes of the formation of the Ministry. Primarily, work within the legislatures was being taken up so as to combat the 1935 Act "from within". The success of the Congress experiment would lie in the ministries' ability to stretch provincial autonomy beyond the parameters of the 1935 Act and to thereby show the limitations of a partial transfer of power. In practical terms, the test of this would lie in Congressmen's ability to take up defiant positions vis-à-vis the British Government and to force a break on an issue, which embarrassed the colonial authorities. The speech of Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Minister of Revenue in the UP Cabinet, in the opening session of the UP Legislative Assembly was a pointer to this:

> We are determined to use every ounce of our strength, every single ounce...to create a power of resistance, which will induce our people not to remain subject to this Act any longer than is possible.... We have come to work it not for the purpose of carrying on this creaky machine for any length of time; we have come here either to improve that machine out of existence or to walk out of the Assembly if we cannot do that....[1]

[1] The speech was made on 6 September 1937, *United Provinces Legislative Assembly Debates* (henceforth *UPLAD*), Vol. 1, pp. 272–73.

The Congress ministries were expected not to "govern" as much as to generate public enthusiasm for the nationalist cause, that is, acts of legislation would emanate from mass movements which would be triggered off by activities in the legislatures. In this context, Jawaharlal Nehru, as President of the Congress, had argued that agrarian legislation must assume priority for the Congress ministries as "the masses will realize by this, as by nothing else, that a new spirit moves the new cabinets and provincial governments".[2] The creation of a "new order" in the countryside so as to give the ultimate objective of gaining independence a concrete reality was an important objective of forming the ministry.[3] It was also hoped by some, if not all Congressmen, that the period during which the Congress was in office, however short-lived, would make possible the enactment of some ameliorative legislation for the people.[4]

In the early months of the Congress in office, the main thrust of legislative activity seems to have been the realization of the third objective, that is, the creation of a "new order" in the province. Respect for civil liberties was an important priority and, immediately on assumption of office, the new ministry made a declaration that all organizations under a ban since the Civil Disobedience days would now be allowed to function freely. This enabled groups like the Hindustani Seva Dal and the Youth Leagues to openly resume their activities.[5] All securities demanded from presses under

[2] Jawaharlal Nehru to leaders of Congress Party in the Provincial Assemblies, 16 July 1937, *SWJN*, Vol. 8, p. 281.

[3] "We want to create a new heaven and a new earth so far as we can", Kailash Nath Katju, Minister of Justice in the UP Legislative Assembly, 6 September 1937, *UPLAD*, Vol. 1, pp. 265–71.

[4] See for instance, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai's comments while placing the Tenancy Bill before the Select Committee on 27 April 1938: "I accept that a lot of people in our Party do not find this Bill up to their expectations. I also accept that there were a lot of provisions that we wished to incorporate within this Bill but were unable to.... But I hope that the main provision of this Bill will be accepted, given the present situation in which we placed" (translated from Hindi), *UPLAD*, Vol. 6 (1–27 April 1938), pp. 1333–34.

[5] Notification of C.W. Gwynne, Chief Secretary of the UP dated 20 July 1937 on associations like the Youth League, Naujawan Bharat Sabha, Workers and Peasants Party, Hindustani Seva Dal, Mahabir Dal, etc., under Section 16 of the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908, *AICC*/28/1937, p. 11.

Section 108 Cr.P.C. were cancelled and for the future all presses were to be released from security.[6] The ministry in the UP also decided to give up the practice of reporting political speeches as a general rule, though reserving the right to report them in special cases.[7] This was all very well in the initial period, but the consequences of an unrestrained exercise of civil liberties over a longer period could be problematic as we shall see later in this chapter.

It was also decided to do away with some of the trappings of colonial patronage. Thus the practice of conferring titles and decorations, which had hitherto been used "in order to encourage people in their resistance to the nation in her onward march" was to be discontinued.[8] There was much talk of the abolition of the posts of honorary magistrates and assistant collectors, yet another set of institutions created by the British Government in order to reward the loyalists.[9] The decision to depart from the earlier practice of conducting all legislative proceedings in English and to encourage the use of Hindustani was a step towards indigenizing the administration.[10]

These measures, symbolic as they were, had a far reaching impact. They set the mood for popular Congress activity in the countryside. While, on the one hand, local Congressmen could express their views freely, without any restraint, they were also able, on the other hand, to promote anti-British propaganda. Attacks on, and defiance of, the police, attempts to set up Congress panchayats as an alternative to the colonial judicial structure and intervention in other levels of District Administration were

[6] Letter from the Premier, G.B. Pant to Nehru on removal of bans, 19 July 1937, *JN Papers*, Vol. 79, p. 21. Also *Home Poll*, 18/7/37, FR UP ii.

[7] See the UP Chief Secretary, C.W. Gwynne's directive to the Inspector General of Police of 15 September 1937, appended to the fortnightly report. *Home Poll*, 18/9/37, FR UP ii.

[8] The Premier's speech in the Legislative Assembly on 19 January 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 3, p. 393.

[9] Linlithgow to Haig, 15 December 1937, *Haig Papers*, Roll 2.

[10] In support of this step the Premier pointed out that the aims of legislative activity could not be realized if "our vehicle of expression is to be confined to a language which many of the members of this House had never cared to cultivate." Speech in Legislative Assembly on 28 September 1937, *UPLAD*, Vol. 2, p. 1301.

reported from several parts of the province.[11] It is no small wonder then that the British administrators were visibly shaken after the constitutional experiment.[12]

Release of Political Prisoners

While many of the administrative steps mentioned earlier were minor and largely symbolic in nature, the release of political prisoners created a new mood of freedom of thought and expression. The term "political prisoners" referred primarily to those revolutionary terrorists and Communists who had been convicted in the 1920s or even earlier. An inventory of these prisoners in the UP revealed that they were broadly divisible into three categories:

(*a*) the five prisoners involved in the Kakori Conspiracy Case of 1925[13] and convicted for life imprisonment. In all there were seven Kakori prisoners in jail but two were in jails outside the province;
(*b*) those serving shorter sentences for "miscellaneous offenses of revolutionary violence or possession of bombs or arms"; and
(*c*) persons convicted or under prosecution for seditious or communist speeches.[14]

[11] Linlithgow in a letter to Haig dated 16 September 1937 quotes from a UP report about the organization of Congress police stations in Aligarh and Congress courts in Mirzapur. *Haig Papers*, Roll 2. On 24 October, anti-Police Day was celebrated with enthusiasm especially in Kanpur. *Home Poll*, 18/10/37, FR UP ii, for the second half of October.

[12] The Governor, Sir Harry Haig referred to a certain "loss of authority" suffered by the administration with the police being worst affected. Haig's memorandum on the existing political situation, 19 December 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[13] On 9 August 1925, an armed dacoity had taken place in a passenger train at Kakori station near Lucknow. Cash and currency were plundered from the guard's van and one person was killed. A number of Hindustan Republican Army members were arrested and 21 were prosecuted. While two were acquitted, three were sentenced to death, one to transportation for life and the rest to varying terms of imprisonment. *SWGBP*, Vol. 7, p. 346.

[14] The Governor of the UP to the Viceroy, 16 July 1937, *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

In all, the release of political prisoners was to be a major campaign and at one time the Governor believed that about 10,000 prisoners were involved.

The release of political prisoners had been an integral part of the Congress election manifesto for the 1937 elections.[15] After the elections and prior to the formation of the ministry, this matter had figured prominently in the public mind especially when, in June 1937, one of the prisoners, Sachindra Nath Bakshi, had undertaken a hunger strike in Naini Central Jail to protest against jail conditions. Practically every Congress speaker at political meetings in the province had subsequently taken up the refrain and expressed solidarity with Bakshi.[16] Ram Krishna Khattri, a Kakori Conspiracy Case prisoner who had been released earlier, had formed an All-India UP Political Prisoners Relief Committee and set up a library for the released prisoners at the Ganga Prasad Memorial Hall in Lucknow.[17]

After the assumption of office by the Congress, speeches calling upon the ministry to release all political prisoners were frequently made.[18] The ministry responded within days of assuming office with a declaration that all those convicted for seditious speeches under Section 124A IPC or asked to furnish security under Section 108 would be released and all cases under this section, pending in courts, would be withdrawn.[19] This took the Governor by surprise since he was expecting to have his say in the matter prior to a public declaration.[20] When the matter of the release of the Kakori Conspiracy Case prisoners came up, Premier G.B. Pant felt that their release ought to be considered since they had already served a 10-year period. However, he agreed to the Governor's suggestion

[15] Text of Congress election manifesto, *INC Resolutions 1936–37*, p. 4, Allahabad, n.d.

[16] *PAI UP*, Nos 25, 26/1937, 19–26 June and 26 June–3 July, pp. 474, 486, 488.

[17] *PAI UP*, No. 26/1937, 26 June–3 July, p. 486.

[18] On 15 August, Andamans Day was observed in Kanpur and Kumaun. Speeches were made asking for the release of prisoners incarcerated there. *PAI UP*, No. 32/1937, 7–14 August, p. 548; *PAI UP*, No. 33/1937, 14–21 August, p. 550.

[19] See Haig to G.B. Pant, 20 July 1937, and Pant's reply on the same date. *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

[20] Haig's letter to Pant dated 20 July 1937, *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

that each prisoner's case be examined individually.[21] On two further gubernatorial suggestions, that is, that the police be consulted on the matter and that an assurance of good conduct be obtained from the prisoners, the Premier refused to relent. Regarding assurances, Pant argued that such declarations would mean very little and would, moreover, detract from the "grace of the act".[22]

Ultimately, six revolutionary terrorists, including four from the Kakori Conspiracy Case, were released from Naini Jail on 24 August 1937. Their comrades, who had been released earlier, as well as a 500-strong crowd, waited to receive them at the prison gates.[23] In the following days, they were welcomed with such joy and enthusiasm wherever they went, that Mahatma Gandhi remarked with some alarm that such a reception implied support for terrorist methods.[24] The ministry too found itself in an awkward position, especially since the speeches of these ex-terrorists went against the spirit of non-violence. Soon, speeches critical of the ministry's style of functioning also began to be made.[25]

Nevertheless, the ministry pressed the Governor to agree to the release of the two remaining Kakori prisoners.[26] But when the Governor suggested that further releases of this nature be postponed for a few months until conditions improved, the ministry acquiesced. Instead the focus was shifted to the release of those prisoners who were serving short terms of up to one year or those who were "shortly due for release". These were 2,500 in number and the

[21] Telegram from the UP Governor of the UP to the Viceroy, 5 August 1937 about his conversation with Pant. *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

[22] Haig's report to the Viceroy, dated 9 August 1937, *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

[23] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1937, 21–28 August, p. 559. The prisoners released were: Sachindra Nath Sanyal, Manmath Nath Gupta, Mukandi Lal, Jogesh Chatterji, Subimal Kumar Roy and Kashi Ram. Of these the first four were Kakori prisoners.

[24] Gandhi also called the large public demonstrations in support of the prisoners a "political mistake", *The Harijan*, 4 September 1937, *CWMG*, Vol. 66, p. 102.

[25] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1937, 21–25 August, pp. 560–63; No. 42/1937, 16–23 October, pp. 606–7.

[26] Haig's telegram to Linlithgow, dated 14 September 1937, *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

Governor felt that he could not really object to their release.[27] On 1 November 1937, another Kakori case prisoner, Vishnu Saran Dublis, was also released.[28]

Throughout the concluding months of 1937 and in early 1938, constant pressure was put on the ministry to release the remaining categories of political prisoners.[29] Following a spate of hunger strikes by political prisoners in Bihar in early 1938 and fearing a similar development in the UP, the ministry renewed its request to the Governor to sanction further releases.[30] But the Governor was reluctant to change his mind. He pointed out that the riotous reception that these ex-prisoners had received seemed to provide justification for their methods. He charged the ministry with "treating them with leniency".[31] However, he did consult the Viceroy on the matter, explaining that a refusal of the ministry's request would place the latter in an awkward position, since it would have to explain its stand at the Haripura Congress session which was to take place shortly.[32] The Viceroy's answer was an emphatic no to further releases, his stand being:

> I am doubtful whether any ministry will resign on this issue and in any case if we accept risk and decide to stand firm we must be prepared to see matter through whatever the consequences may be. If on the other hand, we give way on this issue, there is, I think, an increased possibility that Congress Ministries will think they can force our hand on other issues.[33]

[27] Haig to Linlithgow, 13 October 1937, *Haig Papers*, Roll 2.

[28] *PAI UP*, No. 44/1937, 31 October–6 November, pp. 624–25.

[29] *PAI UP*, No. 45/1937, 6–13 November, p. 630; No. 49/1937, 4–11 December, p. 653; No. 50/1937, 9–16 December, p. 662; No. 7/1938, 5–12 February, p. 47.

[30] Note by Haig on file relating to release of political prisoners, dated 11 January 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 2. See also Haig's letter to Linlithgow, dated 20 January 1938, in which he mentions the case of 12 prisoners the ministry wanted to release. Of these Haig had objections to the release of six, *Haig Papers*, Roll 2.

[31] *Ibid*.

[32] Haig's letter to Linlithgow, dated 10 February 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

[33] Telegram from the Viceroy to the Governor of the UP, 11 February 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 2.

Consequently, the Governor stated that, under instructions issued to him under Section 126(5) of the Government of India Act, he was unable to accept the advice of the ministry on further release of political prisoners.[34]

Contrary to Lord Linlithgow's expectations, the UP and Bihar Congress Ministries resigned in protest on 15 February 1938, thus bringing the matter to a climax.[35] With these resignations, the British Government was again faced with a threat to its constitutional experiment. But there was little reason for jubilation in the Congress camp either. The abrupt decision to move out of the sphere of constitutional activity created a political vacuum for the Congress. The suddenness of the resignation left the people in the two provinces too bewildered to react sufficiently.[36] (In this sense there was a difference between this resignation and the political context in which the final resignations occurred in October–November 1939.) Hence, both the British Government and the Congress were keen on a settlement. After lengthy discussions between the Premier and the Governor, an agreement was arrived at whereby the Governor agreed to remit the unexpired portion of the sentence in the case of certain political prisoners, whose records had been individually examined under Section 401 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. As for the cases of other prisoners, they would be individually examined by the minister concerned and appropriate action taken within a short period.[37]

[34] From the statement made by G.B. Pant on the ministerial crisis in the UP Legislative Assembly on 1 March 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 4, p. 45.

[35] See Pant's statement to the Press at Haripura on 18 February 1938: "It would be a mockery even of the provincial autonomy provided in this grotesque scheme of the Government of India Act, if the Governor were allowed to override his Council in...matters of detail regarding individual cases", *SWGBP*, Vol. 8, p. 267. The resolution at Haripura on the ministerial crisis stated: "Experience of Office by the Congress Ministries in the provinces has shown that at least in 2 provinces, the UP and Bihar, there has in fact been interference in the day to day administration of the provincial affairs...." *AICC*/C-3/1938, pp. 13–14.

[36] "The crisis was evidently brewing for some time. But it was allowed to burst on us suddenly. The country was not prepared for it." Editorial in *The Congress Socialist*, 5 March 1938, p. 165.

[37] Joint statement issued by the Governor and the Premier of the UP, 25 February 1938, *AICC*/G-3/1938, p. 23.

While the incident strengthened the hands of the Congress ministry by silencing those critics who had been alleging that the ministry was betraying the people, it also marked a change in the "wrecking tactics" of the Congress. It was realized that an untimely resignation of the ministries would lay the Congress open to the charge of having achieved nothing by accepting office. No small wonder then that in the ensuing months there was a change in the quality of rhetoric from Congress benches in the UP legislature. In place of lengthy speeches on the Government of India Act and British imperialism, there ensued a series of proposals for what we may broadly term as "constructive legislation".

The United Provinces Tenancy Act

The best example of such constructive activity was the United Provinces Tenancy Act of 1939. It is no exaggeration to say that the Tenancy Bill was the *crowning* achievement of the UP Congress ministry. Of its 28 months in office, some 22 were spent in deliberations on the Tenancy Bill, either in specialized committees or on the floors of the Legislative Assembly and Council.

The Premier, in his policy statement to the Legislative Assembly on 2 August 1937, had announced the formation of two committees—one to examine the existing tenancy laws and to suggest improvements and the other to do the same for debt laws.[38] The Premier also added: " The Government are anxious to take the opposition into confidence at every stage."[39] Accordingly, the Tenancy and Land Revenue Committee had representatives from the National Agriculturists' Parties of Agra and Oudh, the Muslim League and Independents, besides Congressmen who constituted the majority. This committee, whose membership varied from 21 to 25 members, began its deliberations on 8 November 1937 and concluded them in April 1938.[40] (For some days during February and March 1938, there were no sittings.)

[38] *UPLAD*, Vol. 1, pp. 27–31. See also 'What the U.P. Government Propose to do for the Peasants', *AICC*/28/1937, pp. 23–25.

[39] *UPLAD*, Vol. 1, p. 31.

[40] Tenancy and Land Revenue Committee Proceedings, *Revenue File 458(1)/ 1937 (Uttar Pradesh State Archives henceforth UPSA).*

On 29 April 1938, the draft Bill was placed on the table of the Legislative Assembly amidst much fanfare. But there were some sections of the Bill on which the Committee had been unable to reach a consensus and the Revenue Minister placed the Bill before a Select Committee of the UP Legislative Assembly on 27 April 1938.[41] After a nearly five-month long deliberation period, the Select Committee presented its final version of the Bill in October 1938. But the landlords, feeling that the Select Committee had overruled many of their objections, appealed to the Governor and the Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Congress to intercede on their behalf. The Governor, who was keen to adhere to the principles of provincial autonomy as far as possible, expressed his inability to help the landlords.[42] The Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Congress, on the other hand, was willing to mediate but since the landlords were unable to compose their mutual differences and present a joint front, the offer came to naught.[43] This attempted intervention by the Parliamentary Sub-Committee requires explanation: perhaps the Congress High Command felt that the UP ministry was too harsh with the landlords. Or perhaps this was an attempt to replace class conflict with class adjustment—a possibility which was rather remote in a place like the UP, where the polarization between the big landlords and the tenants was quite extreme.

In the Legislative Assembly, deliberations on the Bill began on 10 November 1938 and continued with interruptions until 24 April 1939, when the Bill was finally passed after its third reading. But the end was not yet in sight. A new chapter unfolded when the Bill reached the landlord-dominated Legislative Council and was faced with almost certain rejection. The months of June–July 1939 were spent in hectic parleys between the Premier and landlord representatives from the Legislative Council.[44] The latter insisted

[41] *UPLAD*, Vol. 6, 1938, 1–27 April, pp. 1333–34.

[42] Haig informed the *taluqdars* who met him that "in my opinion, there was no possibility of the Governor, the Governor General or the Secretary of State intervening in connection with this Tenancy Bill..." Haig to Linlithgow, 8 November 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[43] See letters from Vallabhbhai Patel to the Nawab of Chhatari, dated 28 September, 15 October, 2 November and 10 November 1938, *Nawab of Chhatari Papers*, correspondence with Vallabhbhai Patel.

[44] Haig to Linltihgow, 24 June 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

on the Bill being referred to another select committee—this time of the Legislative Council. This demand had to be conceded. Thus it was in late August 1939 that the Bill obtained clearance from the Legislative Council.[45] And when the ministries resigned from the office in November 1939, the Bill still awaited the Governor's assent.

Such preoccupation with a single piece of legislation is an obvious indication of its importance. Indeed, alleviation of the tenants' miseries was a priority of the UP Congress. Yet, one feels that the Tenancy Bill could have been enacted sooner. Was it necessary, for instance, to have had two preliminary committees deliberating on the draft Bill? The protracted discussions only seemed to have given the landlords endless opportunities to object to its provisions.[46] Perhaps the ministry hoped, through protracted discussions, to obtain a consensus on the Bill. A section of the zamindars of Agra as also some independent members were indeed gradually brought round to grudgingly accepting the Bill, if only by way of remaining silent and not raising serious objections during the final readings. The landlords of Oudh, however, remained hostile until the bitter end, railing against the ministry for infringing on the special privileges hitherto granted to them.[47]

Lack of haste in the passing of the Tenancy Bill was also typical of the Pant style of functioning. As an individual, he was known for his unhurried, almost lethargic manner, which was singularly aggravating for his colleagues. This made the ministry rather unpopular with the Kisan activists who imputed all kinds of motives to Pant and his colleagues.[48] As the months wore on, there was a gradual falling off of public interest as well. This was unfortunate given the high level of popular involvement with the Bill in its early stages.

[45] Donaldson (Secretary to the Governor) to Laithwaite, Secretary to the Viceroy, dated 28 August 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[46] Their objections ranged from the specific to the ludicrous. At one moment the ministry was accused of having failed in their duty to the minority—in this case the landlords. At another, the ministry was accused of trying to introduce Soviet conditions in the province. See *The Leader*, 11 December 1938, p. 10.

[47] A *taluqdar* from Oudh tried to raise a constitutional objection by declaring that the Bill violated certain rights to *taluqdars* in the *sanads* by an authority superior to the local government. *The Leader*, 22 December 1938, p. 11.

[48] Most often the ministry was accused of bowing to pressure from the zamindars.

In 1938 the enthusiasm for this proposed Bill had been immense. Tenants opposed landlord atrocities with a new confidence and learned to mobilize collectively for their rights. As rumours about the main clauses of the Bill began to circulate, the landlords too panicked and open class warfare was unleashed in several areas.[49] Even on 10 November 1938, when the Bill finally came up for discussion in the Legislative Assembly, the visitors' galleries were packed to capacity. The Speaker requested the members to use Hindustani rather than English during the deliberations.[50] But as the discussion dragged on endlessly, with one weary month following another, public enthusiasm waned. It seemed as if, by 1939, the Tenancy Bill had become a veritable non-issue outside the legislature—it was seldom discussed even at Kisan meetings. The outcome of the Bill also seemed predictable, despite the persistence of landlord opposition.

Act XVII of 1939 (as the UP Tenancy Bill finally came to be known) was an interesting piece of legislation with farreaching consequences. At one fell stroke it ironed out the differences in tenancy laws between Agra and Oudh. It also sought to tilt the agrarian balance heavily in favour of the tenurial class. The grant of hereditary rights to all statutory tenants was only one aspect of this endeavour. By making the ejectment process less arbitrary, by reducing the area of *sir* owned by large zamindars and thereby releasing more lands for the accrual of hereditary tenant rights, by declaring all landlord's exactions other than rent illegal and liable to court action and by making the rent payment procedure more favourable to tenants, their hands were strengthened.[51]

As for the landlords, the ministry treated the smaller ones with some consideration (those paying up to Rs 250 land revenue had their *sir* lands left untouched) while the more affluent ones were subjected to rather rough treatment. As will be seen below, the *sir* restriction clause hit them hardest. Within the class of tenants,

[49] See Chapter 5 for attacks on zamindars in Rae Bareli, Azamgarh, Allahabad, Ballia, Jalaun and retaliatory violence by zamindars.

[50] *The Leader*, 12 November 1938, p. 11.

[51] The UP Tenancy Act had 16 Chapters and 296 Sections. Chapter II related to *sir*, Chapter III to the grant of hereditary rights, Chapter VII to payment and recovery of rent, and Chapter VIII to ejectment.

however, the ministry refused to make such a distinction despite suggestions. Two proposals, one from a landlord member for placing a ceiling on the amount of land owned by prosperous tenants and the other from a Left-wing Congressman to grant hereditary rights to sub-tenants of tenants with large holdings, were both turned down unceremoniously.[52] However, the ministry did not honour its election promise to exempt marginal tenants from payment of rent, nor was it able to effect substantial reductions in rent.[53] All it could do in this matter was to first stay and then write off all arrears of rent accruing to landlords.[54]

The important sections of the UP Tenancy Act merit separate and more careful scrutiny in order to understand fully the considerations that went into their formulation.

Sir *Lands*

One of the most contentious chapters of the 1939 Tenancy Act was that relating to *sir* lands. *Sir* was land meant for the landlord's personal use, comparable to the European feudal lord's demesne. According to Elizabeth Whitcombe, it was the nucleus of a landlord's estate and he had unobstructed rights of cultivation over it.[55] It was estimated that the total area of *sir* land in the UP amounted to some 5,626,442 acres, accounting for 11.7 per cent of the total cultivable land.[56] Of this Agra had 49.1 lakh acres and

[52] The former member was Rai Govind Chandra an Independent but a Prime spokesman of the landlords of Oudh. The suggestion was put in the Assembly on 9 December 1938, *The Leader*, 11 December 1938, p. 11. For the latter, see Mohanlal Gautam's speech in the Assembly on 14 November 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 9, pp. 344–45.

[53] There was at first a UPCC proposal to reduce all rent by 50 per cent. The Premier in his discussions with the PCC pleaded that this would dislocate the budget. Finally, the PCC passed a resolution calling upon the ministry to effect a 33 per cent reduction, which would amount to Rs 8 crore. *The Leader*, 10 July 1938, p. 12; 11 July 1938, p. 10; 12 July 1938, p. 17; 13 July 1938, p. 3.

[54] The recovery of arrears of rent was stayed by a Bill in 1937. In July 1939, the Stayed Arrears of Rent Remission Bill was passed.

[55] Elizabeth Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India*, Vol. 1, *The United Provinces Under British Rule 1860–1900*, New Delhi, 1971, p. 41.

[56] The UP Government's answer to a query in the Legislative Assembly on 29 November 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 9, p. 828.

Oudh 7.3 lakh acres.[57] The landlord had to pay only a nominal rate of revenue on these lands. Even if a zamindar lost his proprietary rights for some reason, he could retain possession of his *sir* as an exproprietary tenant at a favourable rate of rent.[58] These lands, described as the "peculiar property of the landlords"[59] appear to have been intended as shock absorbers for the zamindars. Of course the landlords never cultivated these *sir* lands on their own. They were usually tilled by tenants or even sub-tenants of tenants. Until 1939, tenants on *sir* land could not obtain statutory or occupancy rights.

The clause regarding *sir* in the UP Tenancy Bill was designed to put an end to the unlimited acquisition of land as *sir* by landlords and to give tenants on such lands some surety of tenure. All previous pieces of legislation—the 1921 Oudh Rent Act and the 1926 Agra Tenancy Act in particular—had provided for the acquisition of vast tracts of land as *sir* by the landlords.[60] The 1939 Act thus made a significant departure in this respect.

In its Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report of 1936, the UPCC had recommended that lands not under the actual cultivation of the zamindar should cease to be classed as *sir* and tenants on such lands should enjoy the same rights as tenants on ordinary land.[61] When the Congress ministry was formed, the question of *sir* was first raised in the Tenancy and Land Revenue Committee. Bishambhar Dayal Tripathi set the ball rolling by a resolution on 9 November to the effect that all tenants who had cultivated *sir* lands for five years and more should be given hereditary rights. Such lands would henceforth cease to be known as *sir*.[62] The scope of this rather limited proposal was widened when other Congressmen put forward supplementary resolutions. Mohanlal Gautam

[57] D.O. from the Revenue Secretary, 23 October 1939, *Revenue File* 511/1939 (UPSA).

[58] *Report of the UP Zamindari Abolition Committee*, Vol. 1, p. 162.

[59] S.N.A. Jafri, *The History and Status of Landlords and Tenants in the United Provinces*, Allahabad, 1931, p. 123.

[60] For details, see B.R. Misra, *Land Revenue Policy in the United Provinces Under British Rule*, Benares, 1942, pp. 174–75.

[61] *Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report*, 1936 Reprint, Gurgaon, n.d., p. ix.

[62] *Tenancy and Land Revenue Committee Proceedings*, p. 4.

proposed restriction of a zamindar's *sir* to a maximum of 50 acres,[63] Choudhary Khushi Ram (Congress MLA from Meerut) suggested that for landlords paying up to Rs 100 land revenue, there should be no *sir* restriction.[64] Thakur Singhasan Singh (Gorakhpur Congress MLA) had a more conservative proposal—that landlords paying up to Rs 1,000 as land revenue should not be placed under any *sir* restriction. As for landlords paying more than Rs 1,000, they should be allowed to retain 50 per cent of their existing *sir* lands.[65] (Here we can see the looseness of the Congress organizational structure wherein members professed such different class interests.)

The landlords were utterly flabbergasted by these proposals. The first reaction of NAP members on the Committee was to put up a spirited defence of *sir*. (It may be recalled here that it was the landlord-dominated Legislative Council of the 1920s, which had, through legislation, allowed the unlimited acquisition of *sir*.) While several members maintained that *sir* land was the only surety for a zamindar if his holding dwindled or he was reduced to penury, one landlord even tried to make out a case for the perpetuation of *sir* on the ground that it kept landless agricultural labour in employment and asked where these labourers would go if tenants were given hereditary rights on *sir* land![66]

But when the landlords found that Congressmen, who had a majority in the Committee, were singularly unimpressed by these arguments, they changed their tactics. Instead of defending *sir* in toto they began participating in discussions on limitation of *sir*. The idea was to try and salvage as much as they could. They bargained with Congressmen on three counts: (*a*) on the classification of landlords, that is, they supported Singhasan Singh's suggestion that the dividing line should be at Rs 1,000 land revenue and those paying above Rs 1,000 should have restrictions on their *sir*; (*b*) on the rights to be given to *sir* tenants the landlords proposed that statutory and not hereditary rights should be granted and if the

63 *Ibid*.

64 *Ibid*.

65 *Ibid*.

66 The Nawab of Chhatari (NAPA), Nawab Sir Muhammad Yusuf (NAPA), Nawab Jamshed Ali Khan (NAPA), Raja Durga Narayan Singh (APZA) and Sheikh Habibulla (NAPO) all put forward the former argument. *Ibid*., p. 5. The latter argument was that of Nawab Sir Muhammad Yusuf. *Ibid*.

landlord wanted the land for his personal cultivation, or the tenant did not pay his rent on time and in full, the tenant could be evicted; (*c*) on the criterion for giving hereditary rights to tenants the landlords felt that only tenants who had cultivated the land for a minimum of 10 years should be given hereditary rights.[67]

Independent members like Kunwar Sir Maharaj Singh took a half way position proposing that landlords paying up to Rs 500 land revenue should be treated as small zamindars and not subjected to restriction of *sir*.[68]

The Congress rejected most of these proposals and declared its commitment to recognizing and safeguarding the interests of genuine cultivators of the land. If, on *sir* lands, the tenant was the actual cultivator, he should be given his due.[69] Discussions on the matter went on for days. The final outcome in the Tenancy and Land Revenue Committee was the following: the first 15 acres of a landlord's *sir* were to be left untouched, tenants in cultivation of *sir* lands beyond that limit for more than five years would get hereditary rights and those in cultivation for a period ranging from two to five years would get statutory rights.[70]

Two or three points may be noted about the debate: (*a*) Congressmen made no attempt to compromise with the landlords; (*b*) though, within the Congress camp, there were varying opinions on the matter, the final proposal was more in accordance with the suggestions of Left-wingers like B.D. Tripathi and Mohanlal Gautam; and (*c*) Muslim League members remained silent throughout the discussion and abstained from voting.

The Committee's proposals were, however, modified by the Select Committee which drew up the final draft of the Bill. Chapter II was devoted to *sir* and the proposals now ran as follows: (*a*) *sir* of landlords paying upto Rs 250 as land revenue would be left untouched; (*b*) no landlord would be allowed more than 50 acres as *sir*; (*c*) lands acquired as *sir* after the Agra Tenancy Act of 1926 and

[67] For (*a*) see Sheikh Habibulla on 13 November 1937, *ibid.*, p. 12; and Raja Durga Narayan Singh, 22 November 1937, *ibid.*, p. 14. For (*b*) see Raja Durga Narayan Singh as cited above, Begum Aizaz Rasul, 11 November 1937, *ibid.*, p. 16. For (*c*) see Sheikh Habibulla, *ibid.*, 22 November 1937, p. 16.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[69] Remarks by the Premier in the Committee, 23 November 1937, *ibid.*, p. 16.

[70] Proceedings of 23 November 1937, *ibid.*, p. 17.

the Oudh Rent Act of 1921 would not be recognized as thus; and (*d*) henceforth acquisition of *sir* would not be permitted.[71] These proposals were slightly more favourable to zamindars than the earlier provisions. As the Parliamentary secretary to the Revenue Minister explained, only a rough 10 per cent of the zamindari class, amounting to some 44,000 landlords, would be affected.[72] Meanwhile the UPCC, which felt that the legislative proposals were too moderate, had at its meeting of 9–11 July recommended that zamindars paying land revenue over Rs 1,000 should be allowed no *sir* at all.[73]

Despite the modifications made, the *sir* clause continued to disturb the landlords greatly. They hoped to get a sympathetic hearing from the Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Congress and persuade it to intercede and get the provisions amended.[74] However, since the Parliamentary Sub-Committee did not ultimately intervene, the landlords were left to fight their losing battle on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. There, the debate on *sir* continued for days. Landlord members declared that the proposals amounted to "nothing short of political vengeance",[75] for the "alleged acts of commission or omission of the zamindars during the non-co-operation or civil disobedience days".[76]

Meanwhile, the Muslim League, in a half-hearted attempt, suggested that the category of small zamindars exempted from *sir* restrictions be enlarged to include those paying upto Rs 500 land revenue.[77] This suggestion was not, however, in tune with

[71] Gopinath Srivastava, *When Congress Ruled*, Lucknow, n.d., pp. 27–28.

[72] Parliamentary Secretary to Revenue Minister, A.P. Jain's statement in the Legislative Assembly, 12 December 1938. *The Leader*, 14 December 1938, p. 10.

[73] *The Leader*, 13 July 1938, p. 18.

[74] *Sir*, along with provisions for ejectment and the right of tenants to plant trees on their holding were the three items of the Tenancy Bill which the Parliamentary Committee had agreed to negotiate on. Nawab of Chhatari to Vallabhbhai Patel, 18 October 1938, *Chhatari Papers*, p. 23.

[75] Rai Govind Chandra on 9 December 1938, *The Leader*, 11 December 1938, p. 10.

[76] Muhammad Ishaq Khan in the UP Legislative Assembly in December 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 10, p. 347.

[77] Tahir Husain's amendment in UP Legislative Assembly, 13 December 1938, *The Leader*, 15 December 1938, p. 10.

the radical posture that the Muslim League sought to adopt on the Tenancy Bill at this juncture.[78]

By doing away with the concept of *sir* for the future, the Congress ministry had ended one of the greatest privileges enjoyed by the UP landlords with full legal backing since 1902.

Ejectment

This was a less spectacular aspect of the UP Tenancy Bill. Unlike the *sir* clause, this section involved only changes of a modificatory nature. Even though radical Congressmen like Mohanlal Gautam pressed for doing away with the ejectment process altogether, the larger body of Congressmen, including Revenue Minister, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, did not think that it was possible or just. As will be shown later in this section, they were not opposed to ejectment per se—indeed, given the number of opportunities they provided to zamindars to discuss the ejectment clause, it appeared that the ruling party was anxious to ensure that landlords were not deprived of this means of exercising control over the tenants.

Why was an amendment in the ejectment procedure sought to be made by the Congress ministry at all? In the *Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report*, it was pointed out that the existing ejectment clause was being misused by zamindars to evict tenants from their lands so as to admit new tenants who paid a substantial entrance fee or *nazrana*.[79] The Committee felt that zamindars should not be able to evict tenants so easily. As the Report put it:

[78] On the opening day of the winter session of the UP Legislative Assembly in 1938, when discussion on the Tenancy Bill began, Muslim Leaguers reportedly "tried to prove themselves much more forward than members of the Congress and exhorted Congress Socialists to come forward with amendments". The latter reacted to this exhortation with great indignation. *The Leader*, 12 November 1938, p. 11.

[79] *Nazrana* may be described as a gift payment or increased premium on rent. It was an oppressive method whereby the tenant, besides paying the normal rent for securing holdings and retaining them, had to pay some extra money. *Nazrana* rates varied from district to district. Kapil Kumar, *Peasants in Revolt*, pp. 30–33.

> Apparently it is not the business of the courts to pay any attention to the wretched condition of the peasantry. No sooner is an ejectment suit decreed the processes of ejectment begin. Without due warning in accordance with the law, ejectment processes are carried out and the tenant is dispossessed.[80]

The Committee also felt that the tenants were in a position to repay the arrears, if they were given some time but the zamindars would usually turn a deaf ear to their requests, since they had already received a larger amount as *nazrana* from a new tenant. This state of affairs must be remedied, the Committee felt.[81]

Accordingly, at the deliberations of the Tenancy and Land Revenue Committee, the Minister for Revenue on 13 November 1937, brought forward two proposals to end arbitrary ejectment. Both proposals hinged on the intervention of revenue courts in the ejectment process. These courts would, on the zamindar's application, decide on the action to be taken against defaulting tenants. The first proposal recommended ejectment if the tenant did not pay his arrears as per the court's orders. The second alternative proposal recommended auction of the holding by the court. However, if the tenant was able to repay the arrears within a month, the auction would be cancelled. If he paid up the arrears within a year he could still get back his holding.[82] The latter proposal was obviously more favourable to tenants and evoked loud protests from the zamindars.[83] But what really alarmed the latter was the stand taken by the more extreme Congressmen, Mohanlal Gautam and B.D. Tripathi. They demanded that ejectments be ended altogether. While Gautam went to the extent of declaring that no substitute clauses for recovery of rent arrears were necessary, Tripathi had some alternative suggestions. In his view, the zamindars could apply to the revenue court in the case of non-payment of rent only for the previous crop. The court could order the sale of the holding "in lots" if the arrears were not paid within a month. Tripathi, like Kidwai, suggested that if within one month of the sale the tenant paid the rent with interest, the land must be restored to him.[84]

[80] *Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report*, 1936, p. 51.
[81] *Ibid*. Recommendations, p. ix.
[82] *Tenancy and Land Revenue Committee Proceedings*, para 17, pp. 12–13.
[83] *Ibid*., p. 13. The Nawab of Chhatari opposed the second proposal.
[84] *Ibid*.

Discussions in the Committee on ejectment, which began on 13 November, were laid aside for several days and resumed on 26 November. No consensus could be arrived at with as many as four proposals being put to vote and negated.[85] It was, however, decided that distraint of crops for non-payment of rent should be abolished.[86] However, whether distraint should be permitted or not remained a contentious issue between landlords and Congressmen. The Select Committee of the UP Legislative Assembly bowed to landlord pressure and allowed the distraint clauses to remain. But when the matter came for general discussion in the UP Legislative Assembly, the Revenue Minister proposed that the whole chapter on distraint be deleted. Despite landlord protests this was carried through.[87] Practically all the members of the Committee were opposed to the arrest of a tenant for non-payment of rent.[88]

Chapter IX of the draft Tenancy Bill contained all the Select Committee's recommendations on the ejectment clause. It stated that if a Kisan did not pay his arrears within one year, the zamindars could go to court and file a suit for ejectment. The court would serve a show-cause notice to the tenant who would have to appear in court within 30 days. The tenant could obtain leave to pay the amount in court within 120 days. On failing to do this, the court would order his ejectment from the holding. Yet, if the Kisan paid the arrears within one month, the ejectment order would be invalidated. A tenant would only be ejected from that portion of his holding the rent from which approximated to one-sixth of the amount due from him.[89] Once he was thus ejected his arrears of rent would be automatically cancelled.

This was the final form of the ejectment clause as laid down in the UP Tenancy Act of 1939.[90] It left the radicals somewhat discontented. Mohanlal Gautam, in a speech in the UP Legislative Assembly, drew attention to the Congress election manifesto, which

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 29. Twelve members voted for it and nine against.

[87] N.N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, 1939 Vol. 1, p. 217. (Proceedings of the UP Legislative Assembly on 7 and 8 February 1939).

[88] *Tenancy and Land Revenue Committee Proceedings*, p. 14.

[89] *Sangharsh*, 26 February 1939, p. 14.

[90] From *U.P. Zamindari Abolition Committee Report*, Allahabad, 1948, pp. 170–71.

promised to do away with ejectment completely and suggested that arrears of rent be recovered in the same way as debts.[91] However, the ejectment clause of the Tenancy Bill could have been less favourable to the tenants if the suggestion for negotiations with the landlords had materialized, for ejectment was one of the discussable items at the proposed talks between the Parliamentary Sub-Committee and the landlords in October–November 1938.[92]

Even after the Bill was placed before the Legislative Assembly in December 1938, the Premier in his introductory remarks on 16 November expressed willingness to arrive at a compromise with the zamindars on this clause.[93] Presumably, the matter came up for discussion at the talks between the Premier, G.B. Pant, and landlord representatives at Nainital in June–July 1939, which ended in a stalemate. In August 1939, however, there was a more real danger of the ejectment proposals being tampered with. The Select Committee of the Legislative Council had demanded a change and proposed that if within three years a tenant did not pay his arrears, he could be ejected from his entire holding. The government, desperate to get the long-delayed Tenancy Bill through the Council, was reported to be seriously considering accession to this demand.[94] It even came up with two proposals of its own which both the Governor and the Revenue Secretary pronounced as being more favourable to the landlords.[95] But the latter failed to seize the opportunity and when the Legislative Council met on 21 August 1939, the Tenancy Bill sailed through, rather incredibly, on account of a split in the landlord votes.[96]

The Congress government's extreme willingness to entertain landlord suggestions on the ejectment clause caused considerable resentment among the radicals and formed one of the grounds for the charge that the ministry was anti-Kisan. Indeed, the eagerness of the Congress government to arrive at an agreement with the landlords on ejectment procedure remains baffling. It contrasts

[91] Gautam's speech on 14 November 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 9, pp. 351–52.
[92] Nawab of Chhatari to Patel, 18 October 1938, *Chhatari Papers*, p. 23.
[93] *The Leader*, 18 November 1938, p. 11.
[94] *Sangharsh*, 6 August 1939, p. 10.
[95] Haig to Linlithgow, 9 August 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.
[96] Donaldson to Laithwaite, 28 August 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

with the firm refusal to compromise on the *sir* clause once it had been drawn up by the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly. Perhaps the ministry felt responsible for the regular and prompt payment of rent by the tenants to their landlords. Such a feeling of responsibility seems to have been more evident in the second half of the tenure of the ministry. The pressure of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee may also have made the ministry more amenable to changes in the ejectment clause.

Hereditary Rights for Tenants

All the agrarian legislation of the 1920s (Oudh Rent Act of 1921 and the Agra Tenancy Act of 1926) had a clear landlord bias. That was predictable, given the landlord majority in the UP Legislative Council at that time. The Congress ministry's job was to remove that bias—in fact, it went further and devised a piece of legislation which had a clear tenant bias. This is best seen in the decision to grant hereditary rights to all statutory and other categories of tenants under the new Tenancy Bill.[97]

Prior to this enactment, tenants of the UP suffered from extreme insecurity of tenure. Landlords exploited the growing demand for land and frequently removed tenants from their lands so as to give these lands out on higher rates. The Oudh and Agra legislation of 1921 and 1926 had created a new class of tenants known as statutory tenants. Such tenants had security of tenure for their lifetime and for an additional five years after death. On the face of it, this seemed a progressive measure, but there was a catch. The grant of this statutory right was not to be made by any governmental authority but by the landlords.[98] Landlords obviously granted the statutory right to tenants only when it suited their purpose. Moreover, as pointed out by B.R. Misra, life tenancy, even where granted, was inadequate incentive for a tenant to make improvement:

[97] The other classes of tenants to get hereditary rights were permanent tenure-holders, fixed-rate tenants, tenants holding on special terms in Oudh, expropriatory tenants and non-occupancy tenants. See B.R. Misra, *Land Revenue Policy in the United Provinces under British Rule*, p. 171.

[98] *UP Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report*, 1936, p. 14.

> The possession of land for single life is not sufficient in India, where people have more regard for their sons and grandsons than for themselves, to induce them to invest any considerable amount of capital and labour in the improvement of land.[99]

Statistics reveal that security of tenure was far rarer in Oudh than in Agra, thanks to the special rights enjoyed by *taluqdars*. In 1937, only 6.8 per cent of land in Oudh was cultivated by tenants with occupancy rights as against 49 per cent in Agra.[100]

Congressmen in the UP were unanimous in their determination to grant hereditary rights to all possible categories of tenants. The proposal was first mooted by Bishambhar Dayal Tripathi in the Tenancy and Land Revenue Committee on 9 November 1937.[101] That this was the first issue to be considered by the Committee underscores its importance. A total of 14 members (practically all Congressmen) voted in favour of the proposal. Landlord and Muslim League members were cautious in raising objections. The former proposed that only those statutory tenants with economic holdings should be given hereditary rights.[102] The Muslim League suggestion put forward by Choudhary Khaliquzzaman was a more complicated one: on the first two-and-a-half acres of a statutory tenant's holding, he should be granted hereditary rights; as also on two-thirds of the remaining portion. One-third of the remainder would remain statutory. Both the proposals were turned down by Congressmen on the grounds that they would introduce unnecessary complications: the former involving problems of definition of economic holdings, the latter being obviously too cumbersome.[103] Yet, the Muslim League proposal intrigues—was it made simply because of a need to be different from the Congress, or was it indicative of a pro-landlord bias?[104] In our view, both these factors were involved.

[99] B.R. Misra, *Land Revenue Policy in the United Provinces under British Rule*, p. 170.

[100] *Report of U.P. Zamindari Abolition Committee*, Vol. 2, p. 91.

[101] *Tenancy and Land Revenue Committee Proceedings*, p. 2.

[102] *Ibid*., pp. 2–3.

[103] *Ibid*., p. 3.

[104] Interestingly in 1946 Khaliquzzaman made a statement before the Cabinet Mission that to strike at the zamindari in the UP was to strike at the root of Muslim existence. See Anita Inder Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India 1936–1947*, Delhi, 1987, p. 23.

The landlord lobby was unable to put up more than a weak objection to this recommendation. This was because, during the interim ministry period, they had been sufficiently prevailed upon by the Governor to agree to grant some security of tenure.[105] When the Bill was brought before the Legislative Assembly, however, all the weapons in the landlord armoury were brought out. Raja Bisheshwar Dayal Seth, unflagging in his oppositional zeal, tried to raise an objection on constitutional grounds and wanted to know whether the Congress government and legislature had sufficient powers under the 1935 Act to grant hereditary rights to tenants, disregarding the *sanads* given to *taluqdars* by a superior authority.[106] He was, however, unable to muster adequate support for his contention. Even the zamindars of Agra failed to back him up. From the latter camp, the Nawab of Chhatari tried to bring forward an amendment to the clauses laying down that only tenants who had paid three years' rent in full to their landlords should be given hereditary rights,[107] hoping thereby to disqualify a section of the tenantry. There was also a bid to prevent accrual of hereditary rights on lands situated within a municipality, notified town area and on lands owned by educational institutions, but this was negated by the Assembly.[108]

Thus the proposal to grant hereditary rights to several categories of tenants was carried through without any amendments by the landlords or the Muslim League. At no stage did Congress offer to negotiate on the matter. This section of the Tenancy Bill was not on the agenda for discussions between the Parliamentary Sub-Committee and landlord representatives either—nor did it figure in later discussions between the Premier and landlords. As stated earlier, there were no differences within the Congress camp on this issue which had far-reaching implications for Oudh.

Finally, we are faced with a rather ticklish query. Given the willingness of the landlord-based interim ministry to bring forward

[105] Haig to Linlithgow, 23 April 1937 and 7 May 1937, *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

[106]. This matter was raised on 20 December 1938, *The Leader*, 22 December 1938, p. 11.

[107] Debate in the UP Legislative Assembly on 3 January 1939, *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. 1, p. 212.

[108] Debate on 4 January 1939, *ibid*.

a proposal to grant security of tenure,[109] what was so different and revolutionary about the Congress proposal? The main difference lay in the fact that the Congress was actually able to carry this measure through with virtually the unanimous support of its members. The interim ministry's proposal, which had its origins not in any deeply-felt conviction but in the hope of taking the wind out of the Congress sails, fell through almost immediately. While the zamindars of Agra were in favour of it, the Oudh *taluqdars* and the British India Association would have none of it.[110] On the other hand, implementation of this measure was fundamental to the Congress tenancy programme for the province.

As mentioned earlier, the Tenancy Bill was *the* major achievement of the Congress in office during the 1937–39 period. The Bill was not perfect and in the following years certain anomalies did come to light.[111] But the Bill had come to stay and there was no question of the Governor withholding his assent to it even after the ministry had resigned.[112] The Bill was instrumental in bringing about a realignment of class forces in the countryside. The landlords lost the privileged position they had enjoyed since the advent of British rule and the tenants became more powerful in the rural areas. The legislation paved the way for the abolition of zamindari, which finally came about in the province in 1949.

By not compromising with the landlords on any of the major provisions in the Bill, the Congress defeated the expectations of the British that an alliance between the Congress right-wing and

[109] On 7 May 1937, the Governor informed the Viceroy that Raja Maheshwar Dayal Seth, the Revenue Minister in the interim ministry, had come up with a proposal to grant hereditary rights to occupancy tenants. *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

[110] *Ibid*.

[111] For instance, Section 180 of the Tenancy Act made a tenant who had held the land for even 12 years, but who had no written lease, liable for ejectment. This, it was feared would cause extreme havoc, especially in certain parts of Gorakhpur as well as in other places, where it would give landlords "a very deadly weapon to use against a tenant...", Governor of the UP to the Viceroy, 5 March 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F.125/103, p. 39.

[112] "Sir Harry Haig's action in giving assent to the Tenancy Bill, though criticized by some die-hard zamindar politicians, has been generally recognized as wise and as having deprived agitators of one ground on which agrarian agitation could be worked up." *Home Poll*, 18/12/39, FR UP i.

the landlords would emerge in the course of the passage of tenancy legislation.[113]

The Tenancy Bill was equally important for the contribution that it made to the growth of a nationalist consciousness. It provided the context for a large-scale agrarian movement and gave tenants, especially in the more backward districts, a definite assurance that they would succeed in their struggle with the landlords for their rights. Since the landlord was popularly perceived as an ally of the British, it was felt that it was the authority of the Raj which was actually being undermined through the enactment of the UP Tenancy Bill.

Debt, Rent and Market Regulations

The problem of indebtedness in the UP was as pressing as that of securing tenant rights. If pressure on land accounted for insecure tenant rights and infinite sub-letting, the high rent rates and the fall in prices during the Depression contributed to increased indebtedness among the peasants.[114] When the ministry assumed office, it had announced the formation of two committees—one of which would examine the tenancy question, while the other would go into the problem of indebtedness.[115] And yet, even at the end of 20 months in office, the ministry had not achieved any tangible results on the debt front. The Cabinet sought to explain this by stating that other preoccupations had taken up so much of their time and energies that they had little time for debt legislation.[116] Presumably, the main preoccupation had been the Tenancy Bill.

In January 1938, Zahirul Hasnain Lari, a Muslim League member, had sought to introduce a Debtor's Relief Bill, but it was turned down by the Government on the ground that a more comprehensive

[113] See Haig to Linlithgow, 12 June 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[114] Kapil Kumar in his *Peasants in Revolt* has systematically traced the growth of peasant indebtedness in this region. See pp. 20–23.

[115] See note titled "What U.P. Government proposed to do for the Peasants", *AICC*, 28/1937, pp. 23–25.

[116] A.P. Jain's statement in the Assembly on 19 October 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 8, p. 291.

piece of debt legislation was on the anvil.[117] However, even as late as October 1938, the ministry had nothing to show by way of debt legislation. When it sought a further extension of the Temporary Postponement of Decrees Bill, there was much criticism from the opposition benches.[118]

Finally, a Bill titled the UP Agriculturists and Workmen's Debt Redemption Bill was introduced in the Assembly in April 1939. The Bill was applicable to the following categories of people:

(*a*) proprietors paying not more than Rs 500 as land revenue;
(*b*) tenants paying not more than Rs 500 as rent; and
(*c*) wage-earners whose wages did not exceed Rs 60 per month.

The Bill laid down that on all loans incurred before 1 January 1938, the creditor would have to sue for the realization of outstanding debts within one year of the coming into force of the Bill. The court would then apply the provisions of the Bill designed to reduce debt. If the creditor did not go to the court, the debt would be deemed to have been discharged.[119]

As for rates of interest, it proposed that interest on unsecured debts and secured debts must not exceed 8 per cent per annum and 5 per cent per annum respectively.[120] (It may be mentioned here that the Muslim League Member's Bill had proposed that the rates be fixed at 12 per cent for unsecured debts and 8 per cent for secured debts.[121]) Sale of land for the realization of debts was not to be permitted—land could, at best, be transferred at a valuation to the creditor. In the case of agricultural produce, only one-fourth of the produce would be liable to attachment at any one time.[122] Though the terms of the Bill seemed rather fair to the debtor (a 5 per cent rate of interest being moderate by contemporary

[117] Statement made by the Minister of Justice on Lari's proposal, 21 January 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 3, p. 645.

[118] Mohammad Ishaq Khan accused the government of "trying to shirk this issue", speech of 19 October 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 8, p. 296.

[119] From the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the UP Agriculturists and Workmen Debt Redemption Bill, *UP Gazette*, 22 April 1939.

[120] *Ibid*.

[121] *UP Gazette*, 23 April 1938.

[122] "Statement of Objects and Reasons", *UP Gazette*, 22 April 1939.

standards), it did not escape censure from the Socialists. Mohanlal Gautam alleged that when the Bill was formulated, no attempt was made to understand the paying capacity of the debtor.[123]

When the ministry resigned from office, the Bill was not yet ready for enactment. Having passed through the Legislative Assembly, it was yet to come up before the Council.[124] This was also the situation as regards the UP Moneylenders Bill, introduced and passed by the Assembly in July 1939. The Bill sought to control moneylending by providing for the registration and licensing of professional moneylenders, for the cancellation of a license on grounds of fraud, etc., and giving access to courts for the recovery of their debts only to duly licensed moneylenders.[125] A third piece of legislation, the Regulation of Agricultural Credit Bill, introduced in the Assembly on 18 July 1939, was only with the Select Committee when the ministry resigned.[126]

There was a fourth Bill—the UP Debt Laws Amending Bill which had not yet been introduced in the legislature. In May 1940, the Hallett administration decided to put up the Agriculture and Debt Redemption Bill and Regulation of Agriculture Credit Bills for the Governor-General's executive sanction. The other two Bills were shelved.[127]

The failure of the ministry on the debt front lay not so much in a lack of imagination regarding the proposals, but in its tardiness in carrying the legislation through. To introduce debt legislation so late in the day, when most Congressmen knew that the ministries would not remain in office for much longer than two years, was indeed a lapse. Why was the ministry less concerned about the issue of debt than of tenancy rights? Were its hands tied in this matter? Could it not afford to antagonize the moneylender class, whose representatives gave support to agrarian measures in the Legislative Council?[128] The UP Governor reported that the

[123] Gautam's speech on 15 March 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 18, pp. 394–97.

[124] Hallett to Linlithgow, 23 May 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F.125/103.

[125] "Statement of Objects and Reasons of the U.P. Money Lenders' Bill, 1939", *UPLAD*, Vol. 17, Appendix, pp. 531–32.

[126] *UPLAD*, Vol. 19, pp. 490–91.

[127] *The Leader*, 17 May 1940, p. 12.

[128] "A Party of about 14 Banias seems to have been formed (in the Upper House) which is likely to support the Ministry in return for concessions about the debt legislation", Haig to Linlithgow, 24 June 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

Congress had arrived at an agreement with the moneylenders' lobby whereby the latter would back the Tenancy Bill if the debt laws were soft-pedalled.[129] The support of this class was necessary for other Bills as well—such as the Employments Tax Bill, which sought to tax the salaried class, and which was opposed by several categories of vested interests.[130]

Thus debt legislation was one of the casualties of the constitutional phase of the Congress. Once it entered office, the conciliation of certain vested interests to get any legislation through the Legislative Council became necessary—something they could dispense with when they were engaged in a mass movement.

The UPCC's *Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report* of 1936 had recommended a 50 per cent reduction in rent. It pointed out that an unusual increase of rents had occurred from 1901 onwards, placing a great strain on the peasants. This situation become worse after 1929 when there was a slump in grain prices, lasting until the preparation of the report.[131] As the report explained:

> The rent has steadily increased at a rapid rate during the last 50 years, but the Government has never thought of intervening. It has left this as a matter mainly to be settled by the zamindar and the tenant.... This rigid adherence to a so-called policy of laissez-faire...has produced a disastrous situation....[132]

After the formation of the Pant ministry, the matter was not raised until July 1938, when a resolution was passed in the UPCC calling for a 50 per cent reduction in rent.[133] But the Premier pointed out that such a high level of rent reduction was not viable in fiscal

[129] *Ibid*.

[130] Such as the Chambers of Commerce and industrialists like Sir J.P. Srivastava, who spearheaded the campaign against this Bill, *UPLAD*, Vol. 16, pp. 749–58 and Haig to Linlithgow, 8 March 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1. The Muslim League and the landlords were also opposed to it. See speech by Mubashir Husain Kidwai, *UPLAD*, Vol. 16, pp. 155–57. According to the Governor, UP, the Bill also caused considerable uneasiness amongst the middle classes and shopkeepers. Haig to Linlithgow, 8 March 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[131] *UP Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report*, 1936, p. 48.

[132] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[133] *The Leader*, 11 July 1938, p. 10.

terms, since it would result in a corresponding reduction of land revenue and would leave the province with a deficit of Rs 2.5 crore.[134] He suggested a 28–29 per cent reduction. This led to a stormy debate in the UPCC on the matter with some members claiming that it was improper for decisions of the Committee to be turned down in this way.[135] However, the UPCC did reconsider the issue and, after a heated two-hour discussion, passed a resolution rescinding the previous resolution and calling for a reduction of Rs 8 crore in the total rental, which would amount to a 33 per cent reduction.[136] The fact that this resolution was passed by an extremely narrow margin reveals the unhappiness of many Congressmen with the scaling down.[137]

In early December 1938, the Revenue Secretary was approached by the ministry to work out proposals for reducing the rent-roll by Rs 6.5 crore.[138] It was pointed out that this would involve amending the clause relating to fixation of rent in the Tenancy Bill.[139] This must have deterred the ministry, given the already existing problems and delays in the passing of the Tenancy Bill. By 25 December, the Governor reported that neither the Premier nor the Revenue Minister was contemplating "any large general reduction in rents" and "they are manoeuvring to hold off the proposals that are doubtless being pressed upon them by the Left wing."[140] Finally, it was decided to settle for much less—a remission of all suspended arrears of rent in the preceding years.[141]

Before winding up our discussion on the agrarian policy of the Congress ministry, we may pause to look at two other measures which did not attract the kind of attention that the Tenancy Bill did but which were, nevertheless, significant. One was the UP Agricultural Produce Markets Bill, introduced by the Minister of

[134] *The Leader*, 12 July 1938, p. 17.

[135] *The Leader*, 13 July 1938, p. 3.

[136] *Ibid*.

[137] *Ibid*. The resolution was passed by a mere five votes, with 70 voting for it and 65 against.

[138] Haig to Linlithgow, 6 December 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[139] *Ibid*.

[140] *Ibid*.

[141] The Bill was introduced in the Assembly in July 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 19, p. 567.

Justice on 13 April 1939.[142] According to this Bill, certain areas were to be delineated as market areas and in such areas a market committee would be appointed to regulate the market. No market could be commenced, carried on or continued in a market area without obtaining a license from the provincial government.[143] The zamindars, who, until now, had their own arrangements for buying the tenant's produce at lower rates, stood to lose by this measure. Hence they tried to stymie the Bill, not by opposing it outright but by suggesting amendments. One such amendment proposed by Raja Bisheshwar Dayal Seth was to the effect that licences should be made necessary only for markets in municipal areas and town areas and not in rural areas where they were run by zamindars.[144]

The other measure was the Sugar Factories Control Act—one of the earliest pieces of ameliorative legislation enacted by the ministry. It was to solve the problem of overproduction that sugar cane growers in parts of the province were faced with in early 1937,[145] leading to their impoverishment. In January 1938, the government introduced the Sugar Factories Control Bill, which stipulated that factories should obtain licences and buy their sugarcane in reserved areas directly from cane-growers or from cooperative societies. The objective of this measure was "to encourage factories to enter into direct relations with growers and to take an interest in the development of cane cultivation within the reserved area".[146]

A minimum price for sugar cane was also fixed and could be varied by the provincial government if it thought it fit to do so.[147]

142 *UPLAD*, Vol. 16, p. 714.

143 *Ibid*. From the speech of the Minister of Justice while introducing the Bill.

144 Raja Bisheshwar Dayal Seth's speech on 13 April 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 16, p. 721.

145 Shibbanlal Saksena reported that in Gorakhpur, there was an excess production of 117 lakh *maunds* of cane in 1937. Since the factories could only crush a limited amount, there were at least 111 lakh *maunds* of cane still standing in the fields and "the poor farmers are now being forced to burn the standing crop in the fields to save the labour of cutting in", letter to Nehru, dated 17 June 37, *AICC*/L-17/1935, pp. 5–6.

146 "Statement of Objects and Reasons" for the Sugar Factories Control Bill, *UPLAD*, Vol. 3, Appendix J, pp. 122–25.

147 The minimum price was fixed at annas 5–3 per maund. Shahid Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur*, p. 228.

These measures seem to have effectively resolved the sugar cane problem by the ensuing year, when it was reported that "On the whole sugarcane growers have been able to sell their cane to factories and there is no excess in the market. In fact, the important Gorakhpur Division reports an excess of demand over supply".[148]

However, the 1938 situation was a rather unusual one, as Shahid Amin points out. There was an unprecedented demand for sugar. But even in such circumstances the cane growers did not stand to benefit.[149]

The sugar cane problem once again assumed serious proportions in 1940 largely due to over-speculation by the millowners and the failure of the provincial government, now in the hands of the British, to take up the cause of the cultivators with as much conscientiousness as the Congress ministry had.[150]

Welfare Measures: Literacy, Rural Development and Prohibition

If improving the lot of people was an important objective of the Congress ministry, then three areas which would merit attention would be education and the problem of illiteracy, rural development and prohibition. These were important areas of Gandhian concern.

The ministry's literacy programme fitted into the larger literacy campaign of the Indian National Congress during these years. The Congress viewed the prevalent colonial system of education as having had a deadening rather than a stimulating effect on the human mind.[151] The new system of education which the Congress

[148] *Home Poll*, 18/4/38, FR UP i.

[149] "...the peasant's share in the price of sugar decreased when the sugar produced from his cane fetched a higher price in the market. Conversely, instead of the mills and the peasants sharing equally the effects of a depression in the sugar market, an overwhelmingly large share of any fall in the price of sugar was transferred to the peasant in the shape of disproportionate reductions in the minimum prices of cane", Shahid Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur*, p. 212.

[150] *Ibid.*, pp. 231–36.

[151] As elaborated in the *Zakir Husain Report*, cited in C.J. Varkey, *Wardha Scheme of Education*, London, 1940, p. 1.

sought to introduce was worked out at the Wardha Educational Conference of October 1937.[152]

It was hoped that at least in the area of education this limited constitutional experiment would afford scope for reform. As the UP Minister of Education put it: "We propose to examine the whole system of education with a view to remodelling it and bringing it more in line with the requirements of the country.[153] Consequently, the ministry took its time over formulating proposals for promoting literacy in the province. Two commissions were appointed, one under the chairmanship of Acharya Narendra Dev, to go into the state of primary and secondary education and the other to enquire into the working of the universities.[154] It was only in the Budget of 1938–39 that large-scale allocations were made for this purpose. Of the total budget, 13 per cent, amounting to Rs 2,687,887, was earmarked for university education, which was sought to be re-organized with emphasis on certain subjects for which special opportunities for specialization were offered.[155] As many as six committees were appointed to revamp the Education Department.[156] Basic education under the Wardha Scheme of Education (embodying Gandhi's proposals for national education) was proposed to be started on an experimental basis in a few districts. Initially those districts were chosen where there were very few schools of the existing kind, where there was a "strong Congress atmosphere" and where some fieldwork in rural reconstruction had already been done.[157] The new system of education would be more relevant to the people's lives—education was to be of a practical type which equipped children to continue to be in touch with their hereditary occupations.[158] All children of seven and

[152] *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

[153] Speech during a discussion on Budget Grants for Education, 22 September 1937, *UPLAD*, Vol. 2, pp. 884–85.

[154] Gopinath Srivastava, *When Congress Ruled*, p. 69.

[155] Speech of the Minister of Education on 24 March 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 5, pp. 43–44.

[156] Reply of Karan Singh Kane, Parliamentary Secretary, to Charan Singh's question on this, 15 March 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 14, pp. 301–2.

[157] "Some Practical Suggestions Regarding the Introduction of the Wardha Scheme", *AICC*/G-26/1937–39, pp. 81–85.

[158] Gopinath Srivastava, *When Congress Ruled*, p. 69. It further elaborated: "If the time spent were not generally devoted to book-work and daily indoor

above would have to attend school compulsorily. It was also felt that, in the districts, the educational system had been functioning inadequately owing to the dual control which prevailed. Hence an amending Act sought to transfer control of education directly to the district boards.[159]

For the adult literacy campaign, it was proposed to spend over Rs 2 lakh. A network of adult schools was set up.[160] The ministry intended to have as many as 768 libraries and 960 schools set up for the purpose.[161] Literacy Day was celebrated in December 1938 through posters and poems and slogans such as "Teach One Person or Pay Rs 2", "Not a Single Thumb impression in UP", etc.[162] Night classes were begun and often they were inaugurated by prominent Congressmen such as Purshottamdas Tandon, the Speaker of the UP Legislative Assembly.[163] A vast number of people were involved in the campaign through the taking of the literacy pledge to "make at least one man or woman literate within one year or to pay Rupees Two to the District Literacy Association to do the work on my behalf."[164]

Yet, it is this seemingly harmless campaign which has been cited as contributing to the communal divide in the province.[165] While

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routine and if they were engaged for considerable portion of their day at school in out-door daily activities...then much of the objection of the parents in sending them to schools would disappear."

159 Speech by the Minister for Local Self-Government, introducing the UP District Boards (Second Amendment) Bill, 21 July 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 19, pp. 784–85.

160 *The National Herald*, 18 January 1939, p. 8.

161 Reply of the Minister of Education to a question put forward by a Congress member on 9 February 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 19, pp. 803–4.

162 *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938-39, p. 215 and *The National Herald*, 21 March 1939, p. 7.

163 *The National Herald*, 17 January 1939, p. 8.

164 *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938–39, p. 215.

165 See Mukul Kesavan, "Congress and the Muslims of UP and Bihar 1937–39", *Occasional Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library*, second series no. 27, p. 27: "With a man like Sampurnanand as Educational Minister any Congress sponsored scheme of education would have drawn Muslim fire, but as it happened the Wardha Scheme had gaffes enough to feed the flames". Such as "by making vernacular languages the media of instruction, it was undermining Urdu's national role". The scheme's textbooks were "too concerned with Hindu heroes and divinities". Objections were also raised to the schools being called Vidya Mandirs.

the choice of words such as "Vidya Mandir" was indeed unfortunate,[166] it cannot be seen as part of a preconceived design to Hinduize education.

The literacy mission was linked to a larger campaign for rural development. Unlike the literacy programme and prohibition, which were started on a trial basis in a few districts, rural development was to be organized simultaneously in all the districts of the province.[167] The whole project was to be headed by a Rural Development Officer. In early 1938 Sri Krishna Dutt Paliwal, an MLA and newspaper editor, was appointed to the office in an honorary capacity. At the district level, there were to be advisory Rural Development Associations: under each such association, there would be some 20 Rural Development Centres. Each centre would comprise of 20–30 villages.[168]

At the village level a comprehensive programme of rural development or "Better living" was sought to be implemented. It included the setting up of panchayats, village hospitals, dispensaries and veterinary centres, schools, libraries and seed centres, and digging of wells and educating Kisans on better agricultural methods. In order to augment the income of rural dwellers, small-scale industries such as toy-making or tanning units were also to be set up.[169] Cooperative societies for the marketing of village produce such as milk and sugar cane were started.[170] Intensified drives to promote the rural development campaign took the form of celebrating Rural Development weeks at the district level.[171]

Rural development, though not an original Congress idea,[172] was undertaken with a new sincerity, vigour and imagination during

[166] According to the *Pirpur Report*, "The Word Mandir in common parlance means a place of idol worship. As such the very name goes against the grain of Islamic tenets and becomes repulsive to a Muslim..." *Report of the Inquiry Committee Appointed by the All-India Muslim League to Inquire into Muslim Grievances in Congress Provinces*, (henceforth referred to as the *Pirpur Report*), Lucknow, 1938, p. 54.

[167] Gopinath Srivastava, *When Congress Ruled*, Lucknow, n.d., p. 42.

[168] *Ibid*.

[169] *Ibid*., p. 43.

[170] *Ibid*., p. 48.

[171] *The National Herald*, 2 November 1938, p. 12.

[172] There was a Government of India scheme for rural development, which was already in existence when the ministries assumed office. Gopinath Srivastava, *When Congress Ruled*, p. 41.

the tenure of the ministry. In the 1938–39 Budget a sum of Rs 41.36 lakh was set aside for it though what was actually spent was only Rs 22.47 lakh. Nevertheless, the budget of 1939–40 allocated Rs 40.31 lakh for the purpose though later it was reduced to Rs 37.62 lakh when the budget was recast.[173] That it was an important legacy of the Pant ministry is revealed by the decision of the Hallett administration, in the post-resignation phase, to continue with the scheme leaving the Congress proposals practically untouched.[174] The budget allocation for rural development in 1940–41 was Rs 32.41 lakh.[175] However, as will be noted later, Muslim Leaguers vehemently opposed certain activities under this programme—such as the hoisting of Congress flags during Rural Development camps.

A more problematic effort was trying to introduce prohibition in the province. While abstinence was an important Gandhian value and its encouragement through legislation considered necessary, prohibition had another objective as well. It was well-known that, under British rule, drinking liquor had been greatly encouraged, since excise duties on liquor were an important source of revenue for the Raj, just as opium was in China. A reversal of this phenomenon was eminently desirable from the Congress point of view, since it would be for the moral and material benefit of the Indian people.

Yet, when the Pant ministry got down to the task of implementing prohibition by ordering the closure of liquor shops, it found the going far from easy. The loss of revenue that large-scale prohibition in the province would entail was sizable. No wonder, then,

[173] Stephenson, Secretary to the Governor of the UP to Laithwaite, Secretary to the Viceroy, 16 April 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/103, p. 50.

[174] This is what Hallett had to say about the Rural Development Scheme: "I do not share the somewhat cynical view that is sometimes expressed that all this work is mere eyewash, or that it has been undertaken by the Congress Govt. for merely political motives. We must do what we can to encourage this work, for it undoubtedly tends to improve the condition of the village population" to Linlithgow, 6 January 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/103, No. 6.

[175] Stephenson to Laithwaite, 16 April 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/103, p. 50.

that the ministry chose to introduce prohibition very gradually: the whole scheme was to be completed within four or even five years.[176] A beginning was made in 1938 with the two western UP districts of Etah and Mainpuri—districts which, the opposition was quick to point out, were insignificant from the liquor excise point of view.[177] The government's justification of this choice was that since the officers concerned had no previous experience of implementing prohibition heretofore it was "far more desirable to start with two districts which should be least administratively difficult."[178]

The adjoining districts of Farrukhabad and Budaun were brought on to the prohibition map in 1939. Besides this, state-managed agencies for the sale of liquor were started at various towns and industrial centres such as Bijnor, Kanpur, Hathras, Jhansi, Agra, Chandausi, Gorakhpur and Jaunpur.[179] But, as opposition members pointed out, this pace of implementation would not enable the ministry to achieve total prohibition within five years. The ministry was accused of paying mere lip service to this Gandhian principle, of dislocating the entire fiscal arrangement of the province and of imposing additional tax burdens on the public to cover the deficit.[180]

[176] Speech by the Minister of Justice, while discussing the budget proposals, 18 March 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 4, p. 688.

[177] See the speech by K.B. Lieutenant Sultan Alam Khan on 18 March 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 4, p. 627. Kunwar Sir Maharaj Singh, an independent MLA remarked: "I think that it would have been a better test of the success or otherwise of the experiment if they had chosen at least one of the most difficult districts, such as Rae Bareli, or if they took two contiguous difficult districts and two adjacent easy districts", speech made on 18 March 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 6, pp. 660–61.

[178] Speech of the Minister of Justice, 18 March 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 4, p. 628.

[179] From the Premier's speech made on 17 March 1939 in the course of discussions on Budget Grants, Provincial Excise, *UPLAD*, Vol. 14, pp. 475–76.

[180] "...the fact of the matter seems to be that you do not really believe in it. You have only got to somehow or other satisfy the electorate and that is why you are making an effort, a show of keeping your promise." See J.P. Srivastava's speech during the Budget discussion, 17 March 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 14, p. 500, and the speech of Captain S.R. Pocock on 13 March 1939 during discussions on the budget, *UPLAD*, Vol. 14, p. 65.

Labour and the Ministry

Any discussion of the working class in the UP tends to be dominated by Kanpur textile labour which had a relatively high degree of political consciousness and had been exposed to different shades of radical ideology since its inception. From 1931 onwards, however, the Communists had been steadily gaining ground in Kanpur and the effects of this phenomenon were evident in the early months of the ministry's existence.

Industrial workers were in the forefront of the popular upsurge generated by the formation of the Congress ministries. Expectations from the new ministry were high especially since millowners had, in the previous few years, been reducing industrial wages on some pretext or the other either directly or by curtailing allowances and bonuses. Retrenchment of labour in the name of rationalization was also frequent.[181] Wage rates in Kanpur did not compare at all favourably with those prevalent in Bombay or Ahmedabad. This was despite the fact that a steady expansion of industry had been taking place since 1935.[182]

The problems of Kanpur industrial labour were one of the first to impinge on the new ministry within the portals of the Legislative Assembly as well as outside it. In July 1937, a number of mills in Kanpur were already on strike and there was talk of a general strike call by the Mazdoor Sabha.[183] The strikes were to obtain an increase in wages (bearing in mind the fact that over the previous few years employers had reduced wages from time to time directly and indirectly) and to secure a general improvement in conditions of employment. It may be mentioned here that from 1934 onwards there had been a renewed expansion of industry in Kanpur and recovery of profits. Most factories were again running double shifts.[184] So, the workers had every reason to ask for a raise. However, until this time neither the Mazdoor Sabha nor any other trade

[181] *Cawnpore Labour Enquiry Committee Report* (henceforth referred to as *CLEC* Report), pp. 2–3 and 9–12.

[182] *Ibid.*, pp. 34–38.

[183] *PAI UP*, No. 29/1937, 17–24 July, p. 528. See also G.B. Pant to Jawaharlal Nehru, 20 July 1937, *Selected Works of Govind Ballabh Pant* (henceforth *SWGBP*), Vol. 7, p. 194.

[184] Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and its Forgotten Histories*, p. 209.

union organization in the province had been accorded recognition by the employers or the government.

The Pant ministry's attitude towards this strike wave was a mixture of conciliation and repression. While on the one hand announcing the appointment of a labour officer to "get in touch with the workers", it also resorted to Section 144 Cr. P.C. to prevent the gathering of persons at street corners and mill-gates. On 6 August, the police had to "charge and disperse crowds". Action was also taken against some Mazdoor Sabha leaders under Section 107 Cr. P.C.[185] In the Legislative Assembly, an adjournment motion on the Kanpur labour situation was moved by a Muslim League member on 6 September 1937.[186] The new government was even accused of "apathy towards the aspirations of labourers".[187]

This charge was not really justified. Even as the Communists intensified labour agitation in Kanpur, the ministry accorded recognition to the Mazdoor Sabha and announced the appointment of a Labour Enquiry Committee to look into the grievances of workers.[188] The Committee was to be headed by Dr Rajendra Prasad and was initially to consist of five members. After the withdrawal of the representatives of the employers and of labour (Sir Tracy Gavin Jones and Harihar Nath Shastri), the Committee's composition was reduced to three.[189] But these moves were not enough to appease the workers, who demanded that all dismissed workers be reinstated unconditionally. Despite Rajendra Prasad's best efforts, the employers refused to reinstate any worker dismissed for insubordination in the course of the strike.[190]

However, the visits of Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru to the Province in September 1937 did have their effect—some workers withdrew their strike unconditionally, while in other cases employers agreed to take back dismissed workers.[191] At least temporarily, the workers were willing to await the results of the Enquiry Committee's efforts. Militant labour leaders were

[185] *Home Poll*, 18/7/37, FR UP ii. *CLEC Report*, p. 3. *PAI UP*, 31/1937, 1–7 August, p. 543.

[186] The member was Zahirul Hasnain Lari, *UPLAD*, Vol. 1, pp. 281–89.

[187] *Ibid*.

[188] *Congress Socialist*, 14 August 1937, p. 4; *Home Poll*, 18/8/37, FR UP ii.

[189] Gazette of 23 April 1938, *UP Gazette*, January–July 1938, Part VIII, p. 331.

[190] *PAI UP*, No. 37/1937, 11–18 September, p. 579.

[191] *Ibid.*, p. 380 and No. 38/1937, 18–25 September, p. 585.

also alarmed by the entry of communal forces into the labour agitation.[192]

Peace was, however, soon disturbed. The last days of October and the first three weeks of November 1937 witnessed a resurgence of strikes in Kanpur. It all began with a strike in the Elgin Mills on 21 October in protest against the dismissal of some 25 workers,[193] and then spread five days later to the Cawnpore Cotton Mills and two days later to Messrs Bevin & Co.[194] Since the issue in practically every case was the dismissal of workers, it seemed that the mill-owners were getting their own back on the workers.

This time visits by Jawaharlal Nehru and the Premier to the city did not have the desired effect.[195] Instead, the strike spread to more factories; but there were also reports of violent clashes between those wishing to return to work and the militants.[196] Ultimately the former prevailed and, by the end of November, workers were returning to work in several factories.[110] In this strike, the government seems to have been more restrained in its attempts to quell the disturbances. The Governor was distressed to note that the ministry was only "taking the minimum action to preserve order".[198] However, in late November–early December 1937, the District Magistrate of Kanpur did order a two-month ban on public speeches by several prominent labour leaders. Some arrests were also made.[199] (Nevertheless, a week later, prohibitory orders on at least 10 labour leaders were revoked in view of an improvement in the situation.)[200]

[192] *PAI UP*, No. 41/1937, 9–16 October 1937, reported that "Mazdoor Sabha leaders are growing steadily more apprehensive of the influence of Muslim League and Ittehad-i-Millat among Muslim labourers", p. 601.

[193] *PAI UP*, No. 42/1937, 16–23 October, p. 605.

[194] *PAI UP*, No. 43/1937, 24–30 October, p. 614.

[195] *PAI UP*, No. 45/1937, 6–13 November, p. 629 and 46/1937, 13–20, November, p. 633.

[196] *PAI UP*, No. 46/1937, p. 633.

[197] On 26 November, workers of the Cawnpore Cotton Mills and Elgin Mills returned to work. *PAI UP*, No. 47/1937, 20–27 November, p. 641.

[198] Haig to Linlithgow, 2 November 1937, *Haig Papers*, Roll 2. As Haig put it, "Everyone, both employers and labour, is tired of the present conditions, but at the moment there is no policy."

[199] *PAI UP*, No. 48/1937, 27 November–4 December, pp. 648–49.

[200] *PAI UP*, No. 49/1937, 4–11 December, p. 656.

The opening months of 1938 were rather quiet ones for Kanpur labour—workers were obviously biding their time until the publication of the *Enquiry Committee Report*. While hopes ran high of the *Report* producing some tangible benefits, labour leaders were under no illusions about the likelihood of employers accepting the recommendations of the Committee. Hence speeches advising workers to be prepared for a general strike were made frequently in the months of January, February and March.[201]

The findings of the Rajendra Prasad Committee were published in early April 1938. The Committee recommended an increase in workers' wages with the minimum monthly wage being fixed at Rs 15;[202] the recruitment of labour for all mills not by *mistries* (recruiting agents) but by a labour exchange;[203] the formation of an arbitration board to decide whether dismissals were justified or not;[204] the grant of certain social benefits[205] such as housing and sick leave and the employers' recognition of the Mazdoor Sabha.[206]

A month later, the employers announced their rejection of the recommendations of the Committee.[207] Within two days a flash strike broke out in 10 textile mills of Kanpur and soon all the textile mills in the city were brought to a standstill.[208] In all, some 40,000 workers struck work.[209] Though the recommendations of the Rajendra Prasad Committee were only applicable to textile factories, workers from other factories also joined the strike in sympathy with the textile workers.[210]

201 *PAI UP*, for these three months.

202 *CLEC Report*, p. 45.

203 *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

204 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

205 *Ibid.*, pp. 76–78.

206 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

207 *The Pioneer*, 14 May 1938, p. 1.

208 *The Pioneer*, 17 May 1938, p. 1 and 18 May 1938, pp. 1 and 16. Chitra Joshi has described this strike as not just a strike but "a whole city in upsurge". In her assessment, never before or after in the city of Kanpur was there such a glorious moment. Chitra Joshi, "Hope and Despair: Textile Workers in Kanpur in 1937–38 and the 1990s", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, (n.s.) Vol. 33, 1&2, 1999, pp. 171–203.

209 *The Pioneer*, 17 May 1938, p. 1 and 18 May 1938, pp. 1, 16.

210 *Ibid*. On 17 May the strike had spread to the Kanpur Tannery. On the next day, it was feared that the strike would spread to workers in the power house and water department, *The Pioneer*, 19 May 1938, p. 1.

The strike was extremely spontaneous: even the Mazdoor Sabha leaders' advice to wait and be cautious had been impatiently pushed aside by the workers.[211] This strike put the ministry in an extremely awkward position: it was obvious that the workers, without waiting for the ministry's response to the *Report*, had decided to take the initiative in their own hands. While the ministry chose to adopt an attitude of "benevolent neutrality", Congress workers in Kanpur openly sympathized with the strikers.[212] It was clear to Pant and his colleagues that, unless they managed to persuade the employers to accept the recommendations of the *Enquiry Committee Report*, they would lose the goodwill of the workers.

It was after a month-and-a-half of industrial unrest that the Kanpur crisis was finally resolved. The ministry succeeded in persuading the employers to accept the principal recommendations of the Labour Enquiry Committee.[213] Thus it did succeed in playing the role of intermediary between capital and labour; but at the cost of revealing some of the contradictions in the Congress position. Despite all its good intentions on the civil liberties front, it had had to sanction fairly strong punitive action against the labour activists time and again.[214] Critics and opponents of the ministry never failed to remind them of that action. The strike also revealed a conflict of interests within the Congress camp—at one end of the spectrum, there were Congress millowners who condemned the strike,[215] at the other end there were the labour leaders, Congress Socialists and Communists, who gave consistent support to the strikers. Indeed, in terms of labour mobilization the Congress record was not wholly satisfactory. There was a tendency to give

[211] "The decision was taken despite the unanimous opposition of the Mazdoor Sabha, Congress and some Muslim League leaders who were refused a hearing at the meeting and were shouted down", *The Pioneer*, 17 May 1938.

[212] Balkrishna Sharma, President of the Kanpur City Congress Committee, gave an assurance that the local Congress organization would support 50,000 workers for one month, *The Pioneer*, 19 May 1938, p. 1.

[213] *The Pioneer*, 5 July 1938, p. 1, Government Communique on the settlement.

[214] In July 1939, the government issued a letter warning the Mazdoor Sabha that unlawful picketing and inflammatory speeches would not be tolerated. *Home Poll*, 18/7/39, FR UP i.

[215] The Kanpur Congress Committee took disciplinary action against Ramratan Gupta, a millowner and also Vice President of the Congress Committee, for "failure to support the strikers", *The Pioneer*, 24 June 1938, p. 1.

priority to peasant issues and to overlook labour interests. In the elections to the Mazdoor Sabha in Kanpur, a few months after the 1938 strike, the Communists were able to win more seats than the more moderate Congress Socialists.[216] The Communists chose to capitalize on this victory by urging the workers to resort to strikes more often and by January 1939 there was a great deal of labour unrest and imposition of Section 144 was once again resorted to.[217]

Labour militancy, combined with an uncertain communal situation in the city, led capitalists to be apprehensive about the viability of continuing production in Kanpur.[218] The Governor reported that millowners were also dissatisfied with the ministry because of its inability to prevent strikes, which had led to substantial losses in production.[219] They believed that the ministry's liberal policy had aggravated the labour problem by helping Communism to thrive.[220] This drove the capitalists into the arms of the landlords of the province at one stage.[221] Given this evidence in combination with the alienation of landlords and the salaried classes referred to earlier, the ministry could hardly be accused of having become an agent of vested interests during the constitutional phase.

[216] *Home Poll*, 18/9/38, FR UP i. "All the officers (of the Mazdoor Sabha) except Raja Ram Shastri, Vice President and Suraj Prasad Awasthi, one of the seven joint secretaries, are believed to be Communists."

[217] *Home Poll*, 18/1/39, FR UP i.

[218] *Home Poll*, 18/4/39, FR UP ii. In the New Victoria Mills it was announced that from the following week the mill would be open only three days a week. In the Swadeshi Cotton Mill the management warned that unless the "Standard of work improves", the night shift would be closed down.

[219] Haig to Linlithgow, 6 December 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1. See also speech by Zahirul Hasnain Lari in the UP Legislative Assembly on 5 August 1938, when the UP Trade Union Recognition Bill was introduced by the Congress: "You go to the share markets and you will find that the shares of the mills in the province are at a low ebb since these labour troubles. We have heard that some industrialists are thinking of opening out in Indian States", *UPLAD*, Vol. 7, p. 512–13.

[220] Haig to Linlithgow, 6 December 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1. "The employers were very critical of Government and said that it would require very little action on their part to put down the Communist agitation."

[221] See headlines in *The Pioneer*, 31 May 1938, p. 1: "New Coalition in UP... Landlords and Industrialists to Unite...Congress Failure to Protect Rights".

The Ministry and the Communal Problem[222]

Any assessment of the Congress ministry's performance in the 1937–39 period would have to take cognizance of the fact that these years saw an aggravation of the communal problem and the emergence of the Muslim League as a powerful force in Indian politics. That this phenomenon was especially pronounced in the UP makes it necessary for us to take note of the problem, inadequate though our understanding of it may be.

The growth of communalism is a complex phenomenon and one has to steer clear of moral positions and simplistic statements. It would, for instance, be convenient to point an accusing finger at the Congress for making concessions to communal forces by (*a*) recognizing the existence of the Muslim League and, at times, even entering into negotiations with it; (*b*) not reversing the status quo regarding separate electorates or community-wise representation in services; and (*c*) harbouring within its ranks Hindu communal forces which alienated the Muslim League and enabled it to project the Congress as a Hindu party to the Muslim masses. While each of these charges has its own validity, they are only a partial rendering of the truth. Nor, when taken together, do they provide a satisfactory answer to the basic problem? In fact, they tend to distort the reality or present an exaggerated picture. To take the third factor, for instance. While it is true that some local level Congressmen in the UP were active in Hindu communal organizations, that Congress MLAs like Radha Kant Malaviya made communally provocative statements in the UP Legislature,[223] it must be noted that the individuals were marginal to the Congress and were not

[222] This has been discussed at length by Salil Misra in his "A Narrative of Communal Politics".

[223] As for instance on 6 September 1937, *UPLAD*, Vol. 1, p. 259. On 1 August 1938 when, after enquiring about the percentage of Muslim representation in the various services he proceeded to query, "what step does the Government propose to take to reduce the percentage of Muslims in the services...in which they are in excess of the population...", *UPLAD*, Vol. 7, pp. 39–41.

Another example of such rhetoric was Vijaypal Singh's query in the Legislative Assembly: "Will the Government be pleased to state what steps they are taking to lower the overrepresentation of Muhammadans in the police and other government services?", on 8 May 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 18, pp. 151–52.

in a position, nor could even hope, to influence its general policy. Neverthless, such individuals did provide grist to the Muslim League propaganda mill that the Congress represented Hindu interests.[224]

Regarding the first allegation—if a recognition of the existence of the Muslim League by the Congress brought trouble, then why is it so often argued that the Congress ministry in the UP made a fatal mistake in not forming a coalition with the Muslim League?[225] In my view, such a coalition would have been disastrous. The Congress would have found its hands tied on every piece of legislation, especially the Tenancy Bill.[226] Moreover, there was no guarantee that, by coopting the Muslim League, the latter would have become less stridently anti-Congress. If the Muslim League were to grow at all, it would have to set itself up as a rival to the Congress and undercut its base.[227]

The election results in the UP had not been so favourable to the League as to enable it to claim the position of a party that was the sole representative of the Muslims in the province. It had won only 22 seats from the 66 constituencies reserved for Muslims in the province. Its very survival in the ensuing years depended on its ability to launch a powerful campaign. What could be a better rallying point than "Islam in Danger"? This was done effectively by creating conditions of near-hysteria and panic among the Muslims in the province, by propagating the idea that the Congress raj was a Hindu raj and that, under it, Islam and adherents to the Islamic faith were in danger of neglect and subsequent extinction.[228]

[224] *Pirpur Report*, p. 2, pp. 55–56.

[225] The historiography of this argument ranges from Reginald Coupland in the 1940s to Khaliquzzaman and Maulana Azad in the 1950s, to historians like Ayesha Jalal and Mushirul Hasan in recent times. See their writings referred to in the bibliography.

[226] It must be recalled that the Muslim League election manifesto had no agrarian programme to speak of. See Chapter 1.

[227] "I have already mentioned the moribund condition of the Muslim League.... Tactically, I thought that by downright opposition to Congress in the Assembly, we might be able to put life not only into the Muslim League organisation, but also into masses...." Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, Lahore, 1961, pp. 163–64.

[228] For instance the League vehemently opposed the Congress educational scheme. Since it was known as the "Vidya Mandir Scheme", the League

When Congress launched its Muslim mass contact campaign, the League took it as an affront and a threat to itself.[229]

This is not to say that the Congress had no strategy to counter the growing communal menace in the province. When the riot situation took a turn for the worse during the Holi–Muharram season of 1938, Congress leaders resorted to the following strategies: (*a*) entering into negotiations with the Muslim League in a joint effort to resolve the conflict;[230] (*b*) employing the Seva Dal or Congress volunteer force in places torn by communal strife to help restore peace through non-violent methods;[231] and (*c*) changing the nomenclature of *Muslim* mass contact committees which made reference to the Muslims as a separate community to be wooed by the Congress and which thereby, in fact, reinforced the communal category.[232]

At the same time, the government strained every nerve to reassure the Muslims that it was not opposed to their interests.[233] Hence it was important for the Congress not to make abolition of separate electorates a major issue,[234] nor to do away with communal

declared that it was exclusively Hindu in its orientation. Quarterly Report for 1 February–30 April 1938, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/142, Vol. 3, p. 8. For a detailed treatment of this aspect, see Salil Misra, "A Narrative of Communal Politics".

229 See section titled "Muslim Mass Contact Movement: Its Repercussions", *Pirpur Report*, pp. 10–14.

230 *The Pioneer*, 2 June 1938, p. 10.

231 This was mentioned by Nehru in his letter to P.D. Tandon dated 4 April 1938, *SWJN*, Vol. 8, p. 231.

232 *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938–39, p. 314.

233 See for instance, the Premier's statement in the course of an adjournment motion to discuss the communal situation in the province on 22 March 1938: "...It is my aspiration and I consider it a privilege to serve the Muslims as well as other people of this Province. They may disown me but I am not going to disown my claim to serve them on that account..." *UPLAD*, Vol. 4, p. 1042. Again on 30 March 1939: "This Government has used the appropriate sections of the Criminal Procedure Code in order to ban pamphlets which hurt Muslim susceptibilities. We have made use of Section 153 A of the Indian Penal Code to run in a man who had spoken against Muslims". *UPLAD*, Vol. 15, pp. 61–64.

234 The UP ministry was willing to concede separate electorates for elections to the proposed Constituent Assembly if the Muslim League so desired. See the statement made by the Minister of Justice in reply to Khaliquzzaman's

representation in the services[235] if the Muslims were to feel more vulnerable as a result of changes in these aspects. Besides, it was not really in the hands of the ministry to make such fundamental changes, given the restrictions imposed by the 1935 Act.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that even as the Congress's hegemony grew as a result of provincial autonomy, it failed to take the province's Muslim population along with it. There was something in the popular Congress effort to create a new order in the countryside which made the Muslims susceptible to the Muslim League propaganda that Islam was in danger.[236] It was also unfortunate that the Congress compromised on debt legislation which would have benefitted Muslims in the UP, especially in the towns, more substantially than the Tenancy Bill.[237]

This often found expression in the growing incidence of communal riots in the province. Figures provided by the government showed that there had been a virtual doubling in the number of

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objections to the Constituent Assembly Resolution on 6 September 1937, *UPLAD*, Vol. 1, pp. 265–71.

[235] On 28 March 1938, the Premier stated in the Legislative Assembly: "In theory the best method of recruitment is that which does not take into account considerations other those of efficiency and fitness.... But here we are not concerned with academic discussion on the subject.... In the circumstances, I think that the question of communal representation in the services cannot be overlooked. It is there and it cannot be discarded at a moment even if it be imperfect or unsatisfactory." *UPLAD*, Vol. 5, p. 454.

[236] The singing of *Bandemataram* in district board schools in Agra was cited as undesirable by Zahiruddin Faruqi, a Muslim League member, 5 March 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 4, pp. 252–53. On 30 March 1939 another Muslim League member, Z.H. Lari complained: "It is the belief of the Musalmans that everywhere Congressmen try to avail of their position to influence the policy of the local authorities...in all places where there is a rural organisation camp the daily routine work of the organisers beings with salutation of the Congress flag...." *UPLAD*, Vol. 15, p. 647.

[237] According to the 1931 Census, while one-third of the Muslim population resided in the towns, only one-thirteenth of the Hindu population did so. *Census of India 1931*, Vol. 1, Part II, Imperial Tables, p. 45, 514–17. Muslim League members were in the forefront of members in the Legislative Assembly asking for debt legislation. See Zahirul Hasnain Lari's speech while moving a Bill to "Provide Relief for Debtors Generally", *UPLAD*, Vol. 3, pp. 611–12 on 21 January 1938. See also the speech of Tahir Husain made in the Assembly on 19 October 1938, asking for relief to be given to urban dwellers, *UPLAD*, Vol. 8, pp. 292–93.

police cases relating to riots between 1936 and 1938.[238] The figures for 1939 had increased dramatically with more towns of the UP coming on the communal map.[239] While the Premier pointed out that the areas most prone to communal riots were also the centres of greatest Muslim League activity,[240] Muslim Leaguers accused the government of discriminatory action against the Muslims: of prohibitory orders against Urdu newspapers alone;[241] of firing on "peaceful and unresisting Muslims";[242] and of generally "terrorize[ing] the Muslim community in the Province."[243] What was obviously being referred to was the government's decision to take firm action against provocateurs—in this case the Muslim Leaguers and Khaksars.[244] What the Muslim League chose to ignore was the equally strong action adopted against the Hindus, which evoked strong protests from the Hindu Mahasabha. For instance, in Benares in April 1939, a 72-hour curfew was imposed on the Hindus throughout the city.[245] Indeed, in the final months of its existence, the Pant ministry seems to have arrived at the conclusion

[238] The figures were as follows:

Riots	1936	1937	1938
	1,464	2,053	2,750

Statement in answer to Question No. 80, on 28 March 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 15, Appendix 7.

[239] In February 1939, communal friction was reported from Aligarh, Basti, Mainpuri and Etah. By March 1939, the situation was reported to be bad in Allahabad, Benares and Kanpur as well, *Home Poll*, 18/2/39, FR UP ii and 18/4/39 FR UP i.

[240] Speech in the course of a budget discussion, 30 March 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 15, p. 651.

[241] Question raised by Md. Ekram Khan on an order served to the Benares-based Urdu paper, *Awaz*, 17 April 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 17, p. 4.

[242] This was in the context of the communal riots in Kanpur in June 1939. The motion was proposed by Ishaq Khan on 12 July 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 19, p. 37.

[243] Statement made by Liaqat Ali Khan while moving an adjournment motion on the Kanpur firing issue on 14 July 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 19, pp. 309–10.

[244] On 2 May 1939, the Chief Secretary issued a circular to the district authorities calling for the taking of strict action against those indulging in communal violence. *Sangharsh*, 16 July 1939.

[245] Speech made by the Minister of Justice, *UPLAD*, Vol. 16, pp. 781–85.

that a policy of conciliation would only give strength to communal forces and that firmness was required in the handling of communal riots. Consequently, it resorted to rather firm action in the aftermath of the Kanpur riots of June 1939. Police firing was resorted to both at Kanpur and in the Shia–Sunni riots at Lucknow.[246] In Budaun and Kanpur, a punitive tax was imposed on the people in the months of July and August 1939.[247] Punitive police were stationed in areas of communal violence. Action under Section 107 Cr. P.C. was also taken against the Khaksars who were playing a leading role in the communal agitation at this time.[248]

The ministry resorted to firm action not only against communal riots but also with respect to extreme and violent speeches and activity by Kisan and labour leaders from June 1939 onwards.[249] In June, the government sent a letter to the Mazdoor Sabha expressing its disapproval of lightning strikes and picketing at mill gates.[250] In the following months there were arrests of peasant and labour leaders preaching violence.[251] Securities of Rs 500 were obtained from two publications.[252] The ex-revolutionary terrorists, who were responsible for a large volume of pro-violence-speeches,

[246] The Kanpur firing took place on 19 June 1939 and the Lucknow firing on 6 July 1939. See *UPLAD*, Vol. 19, 12 July 1939 for discussion on a motion of adjournment to discuss the Lucknow and Kanpur firings.

[247] The tax was imposed in Budaun, *PAI UP*, No. 32/1939, 29 July–5 August, p. 206 and in Kanpur, No. 36/1939, 26 August–2 September, p. 234.

[248] *PAI UP*, No. 36/1939, 26 August–2 September, p. 233. The Khaksar movement, begun in Punjab by Inayat Ullah Khan in 1931 had confined its activities largely to Punjab until 1935. By 1939, however, the organization had 9 branches in the UP and its leaders toured the province making provocative, anti-Hindu speeches. "Note on Khaksar Movement", *Home Poll*, 11/1939; and Telegram from the Chief Secretary of the UP to the Government of India and all Provincial Governments, 1 September 1939, *Home Poll*, 120/39.

[249] The circular of 2 May 1939 mentioned that similar action should be taken against those causing class hatred, especially the Communists. Action under Sections 107, 108 and 153 was recommended. In July 1939, we have evidence of action having been taken under Sections 108, 124 A and 143 A against Socialist, labour and Kisan leaders. *Sangharsh*, 30 July 1939, p. 16.

[250] *PAI UP*, No. 25/1939, 10–17 June, p. 153.

[251] In Kanpur action was taken against Ramdulare Trivedi and Haldar Bajpai, in Unnao against Balgangadhar Tripathi and in Fyzabad against Devendra. *Sangharsh*, 30 July 1939, p. 16.

[252] The newspapers were *Azadi* from Benares and *Aandhi* from Fyzabad.

were not spared either. Manmath Nath Gupta's book *A History of Revolutionary Terrorism in India* was proscribed.[253] Youth League organizer Rajdeo Singh was arrested in Jaunpur on 20 June and searches were conducted all over the district.[254] On 29 August 1939, two revolutionaries were arrested in Fyzabad and cartridges and revolvers recovered from them.[255]

Can it be concluded from these acts then that there had been a contraction of the space for civil liberties in the course of the ministry's tenure? On the face of it, this appears plausible. Cases were instituted against Kisan workers under Section 107, 108 and other sections as early as January 1939, even before the government circular referred to earlier.[256] Still earlier, in mid-1938, the government had resumed the practice of engaging reporters to cover speeches likely to have dangerous implications.[257] And there was the firing on Kanpur workers in August 1937 referred to earlier. But when we compare these measures with the phenomenal expansion of civil liberties during the tenure of the ministry and the ease with which proponents of different political persuasions could propagate their views, then we realize that preventive or punitive action was only resorted to when there was danger of the situation getting out of hand.

Any government, when faced with the pressures of maintaining law and order would find it difficult to refrain from such measures. In the case of the Congress, the problem was more complex: non-violence being an integral part of the Congress strategy, would it be desirable to allow speeches and actions favourable to violence while a Congress government was in office? Indeed, the problem seems to have been anticipated by the Premier very early in the day. In a letter to Nehru on 7 August 1937, in which he informed the latter that police reporting in public meetings had been stopped, he went on to ruminate:

[253] *Sangharsh*, 16 July 1939, p. 10.

[254] *Sangharsh*, 25 June 1939, p. 16.

[255] *Sangharsh*, 3 September 1939, p. 13.

[256] *Sangharsh*, 8 January 1939, p. 16.

[257] "Wherever anything which was likely to foment violence or breach of peace or communal animosity or communal friction is likely to be the subject of an utterance then the reporter will be deputed", the Premier's reply to a question by Raja Bisheshwar Dayal Seth on 10 August 1938, *UPLAD*, Vol. 7, pp. 803–4.

> We have declared our determination to protect and promote the civil liberties of the people, but if violence is preached, whether openly or otherwise, or people are asked to defy the laws or ignore them...it will create another grave puzzle for us. We have already declared that we will not take action for sedition nor ban institutions or speeches, but if violence is countenanced even by a few Congressmen and if there happen to be stray outbursts here and there where we will stand then?[258]

In actuality, violence was countenanced not just by "a few Congressmen" "here and there" but in a fairly substantial measure. We have discussed the erosion of the Gandhian tenets elsewhere in this book[259] and seen how the ministry phase was perceived by groups of left Congressmen as providing an ideal opportunity for popularizing alternative forms of struggle to the known Gandhian one. Matters reached a head when the murder of a zamindar took place in Gorakhpur[260] and similar incidents were reported from other districts.[261] Moreover, the kind of communal hatred preached by Muslim Leaguers, Khaksars and Hindu Mahasabhaites culminated in escalation of communal riots. Indeed, crime statistics for the province as a whole registered an alarming increase during the tenure of the ministry. The number of police cases for dacoities increased from 412 in 1936 to 496 in 1937 to 702 in 1938, burglaries had increased from 28,316 cases in 1936 to 34,745 in 1938, cases of murder rose from 862 in 1936 to 1,013 in 1937 to 1,135 in 1938.[262] Offences under various categories rose by 2,614 cases in urban areas between 1937 and 1938. The corresponding figure for the rural areas was 6,557.[263] It was to control the alarming situation

[258] *JN Papers*, Vol. 79, pp. 29–30.

[259] See Chapter 3, pp. 141–42.

[260] This was in the Maharajganj *tahsil* of Gorakhpur District. A group of 200 villagers "marched two miles, attacked and broke open the *chavni* of a small zamindar who had at one time been the *Karinda* of the zamindar of their own village and deliberately murdered him", Haig to Linlithgow, 14 May 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 2.

[261] *Home Poll*, 18/7/39, FR UP ii.

[262] These figures were placed before the Legislative Assembly by the Congress in reply to a question put on 28 March 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 15, Appendix P, p. 605.

[263] These figures were cited in an answer to a question by K.D. Malaviya on 27 March 1939, *UPLAD*, Vol. 15, p. 374.

indicated by these figures that the ministry decided to tighten the reins in the latter half of 1939. The Governor too had been stressing the need for firm action and was pleased to notice, in April 1939, that "they are much more prepared to accept guidance from me than they were some months ago."[264]

Was this the point at which the Congress intentions of wrecking the 1935 Act were given a decent burial? The Left wing certainly held this view. Even Acharya Narendra Dev, the most reasonable leader in the Left wing camp, felt in June 1939 that the time had come for Congress ministries to resign.[265] The Left-Right polarization in the province at this time was a source of much delight to the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow.[266] The Bose–Gandhi rift at Tripuri too had polarized the Congress and the fact that the Premier, G.B. Pant, was so closely associated with the Gandhian camp made him the special target of Left-wing attack. However, in the Governor's perception, Left-wing pressure on the Pant ministry had begun even earlier. In December 1938 he remarked that "the Premier is finding it difficult to stand up to Left-wing pressure."[267] What distressed him greatly was the fact that, at that stage, Pant was giving in to these forces. There were several indications of this according to the Governor. One was Pant's unwillingness to check the growing volunteer movement in the province which was developing "along military lines" and could, resort to methods other than non-violence "if the majority changed their views".[268] The other was "a series of proposals" such as abolition of the posts of all commissioners, appointment of advisory committees to district officers (which the Governor feared would amount to Congressmen being "a controlling influence over the district administration"), establishment of village panchayats which would be given "very extensive powers" and rent reduction.[269] These proposals do not seem

[264] Haig to Linlithgow, 26 April 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[265] *PAI UP*, No. 25/1939, 10–17 June, p. 151.

[266] "...the split (into Right and Left wings), I suspect, is deeper than it has been before in our experience, and based, I suspect too, more on a real difference of approach than necessarily on a difference between leading personalities", Linlithgow to Haig, 13 May 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 2.

[267] A memorandum on the existing political situation, 19 December 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[268] Haig to Linlithgow, 6 December 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[269] *Ibid*.

particularly radical to us—in fact, they formed part of mainstream Congress activity at this time. But, in the eyes of the British authorities, they were sufficiently dangerous to merit the use of the term "Left wing".

This brings us to the question of what really was Left-wing and what was non-Left-wing in the Congress ministry's programme. Could all activity which would promote a revolutionary overthrow of British rule in India be termed as "radical"? From the viewpoint of the British authorities, all activity which promoted hatred of British rule and amongst classes and communities was "Left-wing". But they had a problem with Gandhi who, with all his talk of non-violence and loving one's enemy, seemed to be drawing the people away from loyalty to the Raj. The position of uncompromising hostility to the Raj that even the most moderate of Congressmen adopted[270] put the colonial state in a quandary. On the one hand they could not use repressive methods to crush them and on the other hand their efforts to coopt them failed.

Conclusion

We will now try to summarize and draw conclusions from the evidence provided earlier in this chapter. A beginning may be made with the civil liberties issue since that was the most contentious. The fact that such a wide range of political activity (including communal activity) was opened up during the tenure of the ministry is the best proof of the ministry's respect for civil liberties. Much of this activity was, indeed, corrosive of Gandhism, as has been recorded elsewhere in this book. Yet it was countenanced and in this respect the record of the Pant ministry was indeed better than that of all the other provincial Congress ministries at this time.[271]

[270] As a Congress MLA, Govind Malaviya, put it in an Assembly speech of 3 February 1938: "we do not care to ask the British Parliament, whose authority, whose sovereignty over us we refuse to recognize, but we wish to work in this country in a manner that a day will come when we shall assert our own rights and establish the sovereignty of the people of India in all matters", *UPLAD*, Vol. 3, p. 1543.

[271] The most "reactionary" ministry in this sense was the Rajagopalachari ministry of Madras Presidency. The B.G. Kher ministry in Bombay had also taken a stiff stand vis-à-vis the labour agitators. The Bihar ministry is often

As for legislation, the Tenancy Bill, with all its drawbacks, irrevocably changed the power balance in the countryside. Gone was the special status enjoyed by the landlords since 1858; the tenant was now more secure. Industrial labour had obtained a minimum wage and recognition for its trade unions, especially the Mazdoor Sabha in Kanpur. The people of the UP had become more literate and living conditions in the villages had improved.[272] More significantly, an indigenous element was introduced into the administration, whether through the use of Hindi in the legislatures or the voluntary adoption of *khadi* by some policemen and others or the revival of the panchayat structure or the prohibition of liquor.[273] Ordinary people got a chance not only to see what *their* Government could do for them, but also to actively participate in the Congress programme through joining the literacy campaign or the Qaumi Seva Dal or the marches and processions organized so frequently by the Kisan Sabha or simply by attending the numerous political and Kisan conferences that were a regular feature at this time. Above all this, providing a protective umbrella, was the ministry itself.

But just as an umbrella has to bear the brunt of the rains, so too the ministry had to face the downpour of criticism. Indeed, besides the metaphor of the umbrella providing protection to the people from the harshness of British rule in India, we may also use that of a horse constantly being goaded to action. Fully cognizant of the fact that it was in office for a limited period and that it would have to achieve much if its acceptance of office were to be justified, the Pant ministry raced from one piece of legislation to another.

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accused of having a pro-landlord bias and was harsh in its treatment of the Kisan Sabha.

[272] R. Coupland, a British observer and constitutional expert, noted that the Congress ministries had a "genuine zeal for social reform". While prohibition and the "new departures in education" were novel schemes, even where the Congress ministries were "working on foundations already laid", "they were able to take a much bolder course". R. Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India (Part II Indian Politics, 1936–42)*, Oxford, 1946, p. 156.

[273] Pant's speech in the UP Legislative Assembly on the use of Hindustani in the Legislature on 28 September 1937, *UPLAD*, Vol. 2, p. 1301. For the good work being done by the Congress panchayats see Haig to Linlithgow, 8 April 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 3 and for further Congress plans refer to Haig's appreciation of the existing political situation, 19 December 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

The tempo was quickened in the months after March 1939 when the Tenancy Bill was being pushed through, three pieces of debt legislation were being pressed forward, a Stayed Arrears of Rent Remission Bill and the Employments Tax Bill[274] were before the Legislature, the Local Self Government Bill and a Village Panchayat Bill were being introduced, etc. No wonder then that at least three of the leading Congress members of the Assembly—Pant himself, Revenue Minister Kidwai and P.D. Tandon, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly—were reported to have collapsed from exhaustion in the concluding months of the ministry.[275] And it was not only physically that the ministry had run out of steam, it was worn and battered by the Left-wing attack, by the action and rhetoric of the Muslim League, Khaksars and Hindu communalists and the ire of landlords, capitalists and pro-British loyalists.

Another unique aspect of legislative activity during these two years was the extent to which the ministry was willing to entertain questions in the Legislative Assembly. Each day a phenomenal number of questions and supplementaries were put to the ministers. They were patiently answered.[276]

Thus the ministry had exhausted itself in the course of the constitutional experiment. But the legacy of this brief period was indeed awesome. When the new Governor, Sir Maurice Hallett, assumed charge in 1940, he was greatly impressed by the record

[274] In March 1939, the ministry came up with a new proposal to cover budgetary deficit by levying an employments tax which would be on a progressive scale. For those earning between Rs 2,500 and Rs 3,000 per annum it would be Rs 90 and for those earning between Rs 3,500 and Rs 4,000 it would be Rs 150 and so on. Despite opposition from the landlords, capitalists and Muslim Leaguers and the Governor's nervousness about its impact on Services' morale, the ministry was able to steer the Bill through both the Legislative Houses. However the Bill was finally reserved by the Governor under Section 75 of the Government of India Act. Haig to Linlithgow, 24 May 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1. See also *UP Administration Report*, 1939, p. 20.

[275] Nehru to Dr Rajendra Prasad, 17 May 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 339, about the illness of both Pant and Kidwai. Officiating Secretary to the Governor of the UP, Donaldson, refers to Tandon's illness and consequent absence from the Legislative Assembly from March 1939 to July 1939, note dated 5 January 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/103, No. 3.

[276] "The number of questions that have been tabled since this Government took over comes to thousands", G.B. Pant's speech in the UP Legislative Assembly, 29 March 1938, *SWGBP*, Vol. 8, p. 68.

of the ministry. We have already noted his favourable comments on the Rural Development Scheme. As for the literacy campaign, this is what he had to say:

> In the schools which I have visited the impression that I formed was that the boys trained under this new system were more alert and far more interested in their work than the pupils in the ordinary old-fashioned primary schools. There is little doubt that our system of primary education resulted in a great amount of wastage and that many pupils dropped their education at a very early stage.[277]

The ex-Governor of the UP, Sir Harry Haig, on his return to England wrote an article in the *Asiatic Review* in 1940:

> Meetings and processions, slogans and flags, the exploitation of grievances, promises which held out the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, stirred the countryside into a ferment such as it had never before experienced. The sense of impending change awakened the villages.[278]

[277] Hallett to Linlithgow, 6 January 1940, *Linlithgow Papers* F. 125/103, No. 6.

[278] Cited in Judith M. Brown, *Modern India: Origins of an Asian Democracy*, New Delhi, 1984, p. 292.

THREE

The Mushrooming of Mass Organizations

Our task in this chapter will be to look at some aspects of the UP Congress organization during the 28 months of the Congress in office. As mentioned earlier, this was an extremely favourable period for the Congress—the repressive arm of the British Government could not touch the organization. Political views could be aired freely.

What significant trends appeared? How did the Congress ministry react to these trends? What happened to the ideological diversity that we have noted in the pre-ministry Congress in the UP? Did the organization undergo any changes as a result of some of its prominent leaders moving into the sphere of legislative activity? Was a vacuum created in provincial, district and town-level politics into which a new cadre of Congressmen stepped in? Or were the legislators able to retain their hold over district-level activity? If the former occurred, did it change the basic character of the UP Congress? Assuming that the organization did undergo a change in these years, did this strengthen or weaken the Congress? Was the Congress in the UP strong enough to launch a mass movement after the resignation of the ministries? Finally we shall also have to take cognizance of the impact of the growing communal divide on the organization.

The early days of the formation of the ministry were marked by two salient features. One was the euphoric response of the people

to this first Congress ministry, which must have been immensely flattering to the legislators.[1] The euphoria also contributed to some of the earliest problems faced by the ministry. Inspired by the propaganda of enthusiastic Congress workers in the preceding months, Kisans in several parts of the province decided not to pay rent. Consequently rent payments in the second half of 1937 were alarmingly low.[2] Simultaneously, workers of several textile mills in Kanpur chose to ventilate their long-suppressed grievances by resorting to a generalized strike beginning from 26 July.[3] Communist leaders of the Mazdoor Sabha were reported to be encouraging the workers to remain on strike until their grievances were removed. The ministry found itself caught in the crossfire between the workers, who frequently resorted to strikes, and the employers who adamantly refused to give in to their demands. The ministry tried, as far as possible, not to restrain the striking workers.[4] But when the latter resorted to violent attacks on the police, a lathi-charge and firing had to be ordered on 6 August. This action gave rise to resentment among many Congressmen and put the ministry in a highly embarrassing position.[5]

With the lifting of the ban on various specialized units of the Congress such as the Hindustani Seva Dal and the Youth Leagues and the release of several categories of political prisoners including those connected with the Kakori Conspiracy Case and Lahore Conspiracy Case, the organization acquired new dimensions.[6]

[1] On 30 July 1937, when the Legislative Assembly was convened for the first time "a mile-long procession of men and women, labourers and peasants ...had arrived on foot from distant places". Traffic on all roads leading to the Council House had been stopped. "All the galleries in the House were filled to overflowing and they had to accommodate nearly six times as many as could find seats." *The Leader*, 31 July 1937, p. 9.

[2] *Home Poll*, 18/12/37, FR UP i.

[3] *PAI UP*, No. 30/1937, for 24–31 July, p. 538.

[4] "We have been throughout exercising a restraining influence on the Collector and he himself was anxious not to do anything embarrassing to us." G.B. Pant to Nehru, 7 August 1937, *JN Papers*, Vol. 79, pp. 31–32.

[5] See the discussion around the motion of adjournment to discuss the situation in Kanpur, *UPLAD*, Vol. 1, pp. 287–89.

[6] "The first meeting of the Hindustani Seva Dal...from which the ban has just been lifted was held in the Tilak Hall [in Kanpur]. To revive the Seva Dal a committee of five members was formed. A strong appeal has been issued to the youths of the city, between 16 and 35 years of age, to join the Youth

The Released Political Prisoners

The re-entry of political prisoners, most of whom were one-time terrorists, into the UP's nationalist mainstream, had a significant impact on the Congress organization. The most prominent of these were those involved in the Kakori Conspiracy Case. The Kakori train dacoity had taken place on 9 August 1925 when a group of revolutionary terrorists had stopped a train at Kakori near Lucknow and looted the mail van. This method of collecting money for revolutionary work was considered more people-friendly than conducting dacoities in villages which had been the practice earlier.[7] According to Manmath Nath Gupta, only 10 people were involved in the conspiracy. However, over 40 were arrested in connection with it. A national committee headed by Motilal Nehru was formed to defend the Kakori conspirators. The Committee included prominent leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, Sri Prakasa and Acharya Narendra Dev. The case went on for 18 months and resulted in death sentences for three of the conspirators and 10–14 years' imprisonment for several others such as Sachindra Nath Sanyal, Jogesh Chandra Chatterji, Ramkrishna Khattri, Vishnu Saran Dublish and Bhupendra Nath Sanyal.[8] The Kakori episode had generated considerable enthusiasm and was an important incident in the history of the province. Thus it was only to be expected that the return of the Kakori prisoners to the province would be eagerly awaited by the people.

Some Kakori and Lahore Conspiracy Case prisoners had been released even prior to the formation of the ministries, for example, Ram Krishna Khattri in Lucknow and Ram Dularey Trivedi of Fyzabad. But since these were just individuals, there was no major impact. Things changed when the first batch of political prisoners was released from Naini Central Jail on 24 August 1937. Jogesh Chandra Chatterji, founder-member of the Hindustan Republican Army, Manmath Nath Gupta, Parmanand, Sachindra Nath Sanyal

League.... The signatories are leading Congressmen of the city. They claim that by organizing the League fresh impetus to national work will be given." *The Leader*, 28 July 1937, p. 14.

[7] Manmath Nath Gupta, *Bharat ke Krantikari*, Delhi, n.d., p. 131.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 134–39.

and Sachindra Nath Bakshi were among those released.[9] These leaders were given a hero's welcome in the major towns. Large crowds turned up to see them. As will be seen later, it was on the youth that these ex-terrorists had the greatest impact.

Long years of imprisonment had brought about some changes in the political outlook of the revolutionary terrorists. Most significant was their repudiation of the strategy of individual assassination. Some, like Sachindra Nath Bakshi claimed to have been converted to non-violence, though this may have been mere rhetoric.[10] Many had been moved by the Marxist ideology and had even become members of the Communist Party. By doing so they hoped to acquire the mass base which they had so obviously lacked in the past. They now talked of organizing an "open mass revolution" to achieve their objectives.[11]

Given this leftward orientation, one would have expected the newly released political prisoners to merge with the Communists or Congress Socialists. But this did not happen immediately. In the case of many, the differences over strategy were too strong. To cite an example, at a meeting in Allahabad held in honour of the released terrorists, Sajjad Zaheer, a Communist, remarked that a few bombs did not create a revolution. The revolutionaries did not take kindly to this comment and one of them retorted that the killing of the Prince of Austria at Sarajevo had precipitated the First World War.[12]

Despite these differences, however, many of the ex-revolutionary terrorists enthusiastically participated in Kisan and labour activity over the next two years. In April 1938, they took a decision to formally join the CSP.[13] Jogesh Chatterji and Damodar Swarup Seth emerged as outstanding Kisan leaders. In Lucknow, Ram Krishna

[9] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1937, 21–28 August, p. 559.

[10] The speech was made at a Kisan Political Conference in Barabanki in October 1938, *PAI UP*, No. 41/1938, 1–8 October, p. 258.

[11] Sachindra Nath Bakshi addressing an all-India Political Prisoners Day meeting in May 1939, *PAI UP*, No. 22/1939, 20–27 May, p. 125. See also Manmath Nath Gupta, "History of Terrorism in India", 1939: "What is the reason for terrorists having renounced terrorism on coming out of jails? The reason is that today Marxism has changed our principles." *From Proscribed Literature*, Chicago University, Reel 14, S/Microfilm NMML.

[12] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1937, p. 560.

[13] *The Leader*, 1 May 1938, p. 9.

Khattri and Shiv Verma showed interest in local trade union activities.[14] In Hathras, Aligarh district, Sadashivrao Malakapurkar, a one-time close associate of Chandrasekhar Azad, led the labour movement.[15] Besides these instances of fairly consistent involvement, there were several others of a more casual nature. For example, ex-terrorists would frequently address Kisan meetings and Youth League conferences.[16]

Involvement in labour and Kisan activity was but one facet of the ex-revolutionary terrorists' politics in this period. Despite their professed renunciation of the methods of terrorism, some of them soon turned their energies towards reviving terrorist groups in different parts of the province. From mid-1938 (if not earlier) small-scale terrorist groups were being reconstituted in Lucknow (under Triloki Singh), Azamgarh (under Jharkhande Rai), Ballia (Gokul Bhai, Tarkeshwar Pande and Kapildeo Singh of Manda), Rae Bareli (Madan Mohan Misra), Aligarh (Deo Datt and Nand Kumar Deo Bashisht), Jaunpur (Rajdeo Singh, Bhupendra Nath Sanyal, Ram Karan Misra) and Ghazipur (Kalka Rai). It is not known whether there was a central authority controlling and guiding these dispersed groups: but from all the evidence obtained so far, it appears that such a controlling authority did not exist. Indeed the terrorists seem to have preferred to function in dispersed groups, maintaining no links with one another, so that in the case of any arrests, the police would at best get information about a single group and not the whole revolutionary movement in the province.[17] These groups, which used organs of the Congress such as Youth Leagues and the

[14] Shiv Verma with the Lucknow Paper Mill Workers and Ram Krishna Khattri with the Scavangers' Union. *PAI UP*, No. 14/1938 for 26 March–2 April and No. 25/1938, for 11–18 June, p. 155, respectively.

[15] Mazdoor Sub-Committee Report for U.P., 1939, *AICC*/P- 20/1940.

[16] At the Kanpur Kisan Sangh meeting held along with the District Political Conference in April 1939, Ram Dularey Trivedi, Raj Kumar Sinha, Batukeshwar Datt and Rajendra Datt Nigam were present. *PAI UP*, No. 16/1939 for 8–15 April, p. 81. Batukeshwar Dutt, Ram Dularey Trivedi, Yashpal, Jogesh Chatterji and Rajdeo Singh all lent a helping hand to the Youth League Volunteer Corps at Unnao. *PAI UP*, No. 24/1939 for 3–10 June, p. 147. Yashpal was the secretary, UP Provincial Youth League in 1939. *UP Police File* 211/1939, D.O. from CID to chief secretary, September 1939.

[17] Interview with Ram Kishore Rustogi, Lucknow, 27 April 1986. The terrorists in the UP had learnt a bitter lesson in 1924 when Jogesh Chatterji was arrested and the police were able to extort from him many crucial details

Hindustani Seva Dal as a cover for their activities, exercised great influence on the youth of the province.

The released terrorists were also able to make some inroads into the Congress organization. In the organizational elections held at the end of 1937, Jogesh Chatterji staked his claim to delegateship for the Haripura session from Daulatganj ward, Lucknow. He was elected. Bhupendra Nath Sanyal and Ram Dulare Trivedi were also returned as delegates from Allahabad and Kanpur respectively.[18] These successes had been in the face of stiff opposition from rival candidates. Yet another ex-revolutionary terrorist who made a successful entry into the Congress organization was Vishnu Saran Dublish who, in 1938, became president of the Meerut District Congress Committee and a member of the UPCC as well as a member of the AICC.[19] Triloki Singh, a one-time Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA) member from Bihar, was secretary of the Lucknow DCC in 1938.[20]

Thus the terrorists in the UP had, in the 1930s, taken to the same path followed by the Anushilan and Jugantar groups in Bengal in the mid-1920s. The latter had become such an integral part of the Bengal Congress organization that they were helping shape the character of the Congress movement in that Province.[21] This cannot be said for the UP; yet the ex-HSRA group certainly became an important element in the Congress organization of the UP in the late 1930s.

Youth Leagues

To turn now to those specialized organs of the Congress, which came under the influence of these ex-terrorists, we begin with the Youth League. After July 1937, when the ban on organizations like the Youth League, Hindustani Seva Dal and Naujawan Bharat

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of the plans and activities of the HRA. David M. Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism and the Marxist Left*, Calcutta, 1975, p. 35.

[18] *PAI UP*, No. 50/1937 for 11–18 December, p. 661 and No. 1/1938, for 18 December–1 January, p. 1.

[19] S.P. Sen, ed., *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 1, Calcutta, 1972–75, p. 474.

[20] *PAI UP*, No. l7/1938, 16–28 April, p. 109.

[21] David M. Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism and the Marxist Left*, pp. 44–47.

Sabha was lifted,[22] Youth Leagues re-appeared in parts of eastern and central UP. Before closely examining their functioning, it is useful to go back to the origins of the Youth League.

Youth Leagues were first constituted in 1928 at the behest of Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose to induct younger and more radical elements into the Congress.[23] The inspiration may have come from the Soviet Union where Young Communist Leagues had been organized after the October Revolution to educate young people in the spirit of communism by combining theoretical education with active participation in the life, work, struggle and creative endeavour of the masses.[24]

Almost from the beginning these Leagues in the UP developed contacts with the then existing terrorist groups. They were also under the influence of the Communists. According to Gyanendra Pandey, these Youth Leagues flourished in the politically backward regions and helped to link the "advanced centres of nationalist activity" with such backward areas.[25] In Pandey's assessment, these units carried little political weight, partly because "they did not extend very far" but also because of lack of a centralizing authority to coordinate their efforts. Nehru's efforts at giving the Youth Leagues a central coherence had apparently failed. Pandey observes that these Leagues "did not reach the poorer sections of society". The Youth Leagues' lack of interest in agrarian issues has been noted elsewhere as well.[26] On the other hand, Sashi Joshi presents a rather more positive account of these Youth Leagues and their contributory role in the preparations for the Civil Disobedience Movement.[27]

[22] *AICC*/28/1937, p. 11. Police department notification dated 20 July 1937, lifting the ban.

[23] "The Youth Leagues were completely under the inspiration and guidance of the Left-radicals in the Congress." Sashi Joshi, *Struggle for Hegemony in India*: (1920–47), Vol. 1, New Delhi, 1992, p. 130.

[24] Lenin, Speech of October 1920, *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1977, p. 740.

[25] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP, 1926–34*, p. 67.

[26] Zareer Masani, "Radical Nationalism in India 1930–42: The Role of the All India Congress Socialist Party", unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford University, 1976, pp. 16–17.

[27] "...despite the uneven development of the youth movement in terms of its organisational strength and sweep or depth of ideological understanding

We have seen earlier how, when the Congress organization rose, phoenix-like from ashes after 1934, it tended to re-create the same structure which existed prior to the Civil Disobedience Movement. In Jhansi, despite the ban, a Youth League unit had been formed as early as December 1934.[28] In June 1937, a Youth League conference was organized at Moradabad. It evoked a fairly good response (1,000 people attended the conference). Most of the speakers were Socialists, though there was one Royist as well.[29] The resolutions passed at this conference were of a very general anti-imperialist nature and indicated no programme for the future.[30] However, there were two interesting facets to this conference: one was that most of the participants wore *khaddar*; the other was the presence of 100 Muslims—a heartening sign owing most probably to the efforts of the Muslim mass contact committee.

After the formation of the Congress ministry, there was a noticeable spurt in Youth League activities. The first attempt at a revival of the Hindustani Seva Dal and Youth League was made in Kanpur in late July 1937.[31] From Benares and Pratapgarh there was evidence of regular Youth League activity by October.[32] In the latter district the ex-revolutionary terrorists had already gained a firm hold on

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and commitment it revealed a definite pattern.... With the entry of the youth in large numbers into the national movement new strains of transformation began to develop within it." Sashi Joshi, *Struggle for Hegemony in India*, Vol. 1, p. 196.

"By the end of 1929 the youth movement was at its zenith and government reporters were weary with listing the new branches of the All India Youth League which were springing up almost everywhere in the country...." *Ibid.*, p. 193.

[28] *Home Poll*, 18/12/34, FR UP i.

[29] Raja Ram Shastri, Mohanlal Gautam, C.B. Gupta and Sampurnanand were the main speakers. The Royist was Kalyan Kumar Sinha. *PAI UP*, No. 24/1937, for week 12–19 June, p. 456.

[30] Here are some of the resolutions: (*a*) the government's action with regard to the socialist summer school at Madras was condemned; (*b*) the government's refusal to include military training in schools and colleges was deprecated; (*c*) anxiety at the unemployment of educated young men was expressed through a resolution; and (*d*) Lord Baden Powell's remark that Indians had no word for honour was condemned. *Ibid*.

[31] *The Leader*, 28 July 1937.

[32] *PAI UP*, No. 32/1937, 7–14 August, p. 547; No. 42/1937, 16–23 October, p. 606.

the movement. Meanwhile Rajdeo Singh of Jaunpur busied himself with drawing up the rules and constitution of the Provincial Youth League in the UP.[33]

But it was from 1938 onwards that Youth League activity gained momentum. The units were still constituted at the district level. We notice a concentration of Youth League branches in the eastern and central districts while in western UP there was practically no Youth League activity despite the initial efforts at Jhansi and Moradabad. To this extent the pattern discerned by Gyanendra Pandey for the late 1920s seems to have re-emerged in the post-Civil Disobedience period. However, the Youth League movement of the late 1930s had two major focal points: one around Jaunpur with branches in the adjoining districts of Benares, Allahabad, Pratapgarh, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Mirzapur, Basti and Ballia; and the other around Lucknow, fanning out into Fyzabad, Unnao, Barabanki and Rae Bareli districts. It may be noticed that not all the districts mentioned here were backward.

From the very beginning, the Youth Leagues displayed a radical tilt. They were, on occasion, highly critical of the Congress ministry's actions: as early as in August 1937, they had joined other left groups in condemning the ministry's firing on Kanpur labour agitators.[34] In February 1938, they vigorously denounced the delay in the release of political prisoners and thus put pressure on the ministry.[35] Youth Leaguers at Lucknow also took up the slogan of non-enlistment in the army.[36] In October 1938, speakers at a Youth League meeting in Benares condemned the Congress's "lack of a militant programme".[37] Meanwhile, those at a Jaunpur meeting criticized Mahatma Gandhi in no uncertain terms.[38] A contemptuous attitude towards Gandhi also marked the proceedings of the Unnao Provincial Youth League Conference held at Makoor in May 1939.[39] Such sentiments were echoed at Youth League meetings

[33] *PAI UP*, No. 35/1937, 28 August–4 September, p. 570.
[34] *PAI UP*, No. 32/1937, 7–14 August, p. 547.
[35] *PAI UP*, No. 7/1938, 5–12 February, p. 46.
[36] *PAI UP*, No. 25/1939, 10–17 June, p. 154.
[37] *PAI UP*, No. 43/1938, 15–22 October, p. 277.
[38] *PAI UP*, No. 45/1938, 29 October–5 November, p. 292.
[39] *The National Herald*, 4 November 1938, p. 3.

and conferences at Basti, Jaunpur and Gorakhpur during the months of October and November 1938.[40]

Ex-revolutionary terrorists (especially Batukeshwar Dutt, Bhupendra Nath Sanyal, Parmanand, Yashpal and his wife, and Manmath Nath Gupta) and to a lesser extent Socialists and Kisan leaders (especially B.D. Tripathi of Unnao) were the guiding forces of the Youth League. When Subhas Bose set about forming his Forward Bloc in mid-1939, the Youth League moved almost entirely into Bose's camp, providing at least one ready-made organizational tool for the UP Forward Bloc.[41]

In the relatively "advanced" regions such as Lucknow, Youth Leagues, besides their normal activities, also tutored the newly emerging trade unions. Thus the newly created Paper Mill Workers' Union, Press Workers' Union and *Thelawalas*' Union in Lucknow were all proffered help and encouragement by the local Youth League.[42] This was a new dimension which was evidently missing in the Youth League of the late 1920s which had only focussed on the middle class youth and organized labour.[43] In some cases, Youth League members also took interest in the Kisan agitation in their districts. Jaunpur and Unnao were the most typical examples. In the former district the link was established through prominent Youth Leaguer Rajdeo Singh, who often addressed the tenants of his district. It was even suggested, at Jaunpur, that the local youth be trained to fight the zamindars.[44] In Unnao, Bishambhar Dayal Tripathi, who was primarily a mobilizer of Kisans, was also associated with the local Youth League which was known as the Naujawan Dal.[45]

Besides seasoned activists such as Rajdeo Singh, a new and younger level of leadership was also emerging from within the

[40] *PAI UP*, No. 44/1938, 22–29 October, p. 284; No. 45/1938, 29 October–5 November, p. 292; and No. 46/1938, 5–12 November, p. 297.

[41] *PAI UP*, No. 21/1939, 13–20 May, pp. 122–23; *PAI UP*, No. 22/1939, 20–27 May, p. 126 for Allahabad Youth League's links with the Forward Bloc. Also see *PAI UP*, No. 25/1939, 10–17 June, p. 150 for Fyzabad and *PAI UP*, No. 29/1939, 8–15, July, p. 185 and *PAI UP*, No. 30/1939, 15–22 June, p. 192 for Barabanki.

[42] *PAI UP*, No. 27/1938, week ending 2 July, p. 166.

[43] Zareer Masani, "Radical Nationalism in India", p. 17.

[44] *PAI UP*, No. 35/1938, week ending 3 September, p. 212 and No. 43/1938, 16–23 April, p. 109.

[45] *PAI UP*, No. 17/1938, 16–23 April, p. 109.

ranks of the Youth League. Jharkhande Rai, son of an Azamgarh pro-Congress zamindar, and a one-time terrorist was one such figure. Rai, who would go on to play a crucial role in the Quit India Movement, was a prominent figure in Azamgarh Youth League circles from 1939 onwards.[46] Besides his interest in the Youth League he was also actively associated with the Kisan movement in the Jaunpur-Ghazipur-Ballia belt.[47] He was also a member of the CSP. In Gorakhpur, Badri Narain Misra was another individual of the same type.[48]

As indicated earlier, the Youth League in the UP had two main centres: Lucknow and Jaunpur. Throughout the tenure of the ministry, the two centres remained separate, resisting all attempts at a merger.[49] After the ministries had resigned, however, Lucknow's importance as a Youth League base seems to have been greatly reduced. In fact, for the late 1939–40 period we have hardly any evidence of Youth League activity in the cluster of districts around Lucknow. The geographical range of Youth League work seems to have shrunk and the movement shifted entirely into the Jaunpur belt. The shift into the more remote areas of the province may well have been to escape police surveillance.

During the tenure of the ministry, Youth Leagues in the UP lacked vision and coherence. Their programme largely consisted of organizing training camps to which prominent leaders (preferably ex-terrorists) were invited as speakers. Admiration for the ex-terrorist combined with sympathy for the Kisans' plight and a half-hearted dabbling in trade union activities did not provide the necessary sharpness of focus required for a ginger group of this kind. The only positive statement that can be made about the Youth League in this period is that, in combination with other Left groups, it acted as a pressure lobby vis-à-vis the Congress ministry.

However, the Youth League movement acquired a new significance after September 1939. The war was seen as an opportunity to push forward the anti-imperialist struggle. Youth Leaguers

[46] *PAI UP*, No. 12/1939, 4–11 March, p. 61; No. 29/1939, 8–15 July, p. 185.

[47] For example, *PAI UP*, No. 37/1939, 2–9 September, p. 238.

[48] *PAI UP*, No. 14/1939, 25 March–1 April, p. 74.

[49] Though the UP Provincial Youth League at a meeting in Lucknow on 10 June 1939 resolved to establish a head office in Lucknow and branches throughout the province, *PAI UP*, No. 25/1939, 10–17 June, p. 154, nothing seems to have been actually done towards this end.

imbibed this understanding from their ex-terrorist mentors and began preparing for an all-out struggle against the British forces with renewed vigour, as will be seen in a later chapter.

Students' Organizations

While Youth Leagues and volunteer organizations largely comprised uneducated or semi-educated, rural-based young men, college and high-school students in the major towns and cities of the UP had their own separate political forums. The All-India Students Federation (AISF) had come into existence in November 1936—at a special session in Lahore, presided over by Sarat Chandra Bose.[50] Branches of this Federation could be found in the major metropolitan centres and some of the district towns of the UP such as Etawah, Almora, Ballia, Meerut, Bareilly and Fyzabad.[51]

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, Benares was the foremost centre of organized student activity in the province. Next to Benares was Lucknow, with Allahabad and Kanpur providing a close third.[52] (Of course students in Allahabad enjoyed a much greater degree of political exposure than students of other cities, as will be seen later in this section.) The other major towns which were centres of learning, that is, Agra and Aligarh, did witness a fair amount of political activity amongst students,[53] but the volume was much less than in the areas mentioned earlier.

What were the main influences on the student movement? It may be recalled that the major nationalist leaders, especially Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru had, since the 1930s,

[50] N.N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. 2, pp. 504–5.

[51] *PAI UP*, No. 26/1937, week ending 3 July, p. 504.

[52] Interviews with Rameshwar Prasad Misra, M.H. Jafar and K.K. Misra, Lucknow, April, 1986.

[53] Mushirul Hasan states that the Aligarh Muslim University "was in the forefront of the nationalist struggle in 1920s and 1930s and remained an advanced centre of political activity". Leaders "closely associated with Nehru and the Congress movement in U.P. enjoy[ed] a greater following than leaders with communal proclivities". Mushirul Hasan, "The Muslim Mass Contact Campaign", *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilisation*, Delhi, 1993.

discouraged students from participating actively in politics.[54] This was in sharp contrast to the Non-Cooperation Movement days, when a call had been given to students to leave their schools and colleges and join the movement. No corresponding call was issued in 1930, though two years earlier, students (especially of Benares, Lucknow and Kanpur) had participated in the boycott of the Simon Commission.[55] However, local pamphlets exhorted the students to join the movement.[56] Besides, youthful curiosity drew the students to such activities as making salt in the towns. By 1932, several students had entered jails along with their nationalist forebears.[57]

In the late 1930s, both the Communist Party and the CSP placed work amongst students on par with the mobilization of peasants and workers. These ideas were put into practice especially in the 1937–38 period in the UP. The first students union in Jhansi was

[54] Gandhi in 1937 stated that students had no freedom of action while they were students. *The Leader*, 4 October 1937, p. 5. Nehru in a speech to the Lucknow University students in November 1937, discouraged them from resorting to strikes. *The Leader*, 20 November 1937, p. 13. This change of attitude has intrigued many: perhaps it was concern for the careers of these students that made the nationalist leaders dissuade them from open political activity. Hundreds of students throughout the country had been penalized for their participation in mass movements; several had their scholarships cancelled while many more were expelled. Many went to jail in 1920 and 1930 and, on their return, found that there were no schools which would have them back. The newly-created nationalist schools were far too few to accommodate all these boys and girls. Even the nationalist schools were threatened with closure during periods of severe repression. Thus, students keen to study further found all avenues closed to them. Interview with Krishna Kumar Dwivedi, Lucknow, April 1986.

[55] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, p. 85. Sashi Joshi, *Struggle for Hegemony in India*, Vol. 1, p. 190.

[56] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, pp. 102–3.

[57] Interview with K.K. Dwivedi, Lucknow, April 1986. Dwivedi was a school boy in Lucknow whose curiosity was aroused by the salt-making in Aminabad in 1930, the influx of *satyagrahis* from the villages and the arrests. He and his friends decided to meet Mohanlal Saksena and participate in the campaign. Soon they were arrested.

Gyanendra Pandey cites a UP Government survey of 1932 which mentions that in the five jails surveyed, 53 out of the 2004 Civil Disobedience prisoners were students. Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, p. 107. In fact, Fyzabad jail had been set aside exclusively for student detainees. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

constituted under Communist auspices.[58] In Allahabad and Kanpur, Communists Sajjad Zaheer, Z.A. Ahmed and Hajra Begum were regular speakers at student gatherings.[59] Members of the Progressive Writers Association also took an interest in Allahabad student affairs.[60] Occasionally Communist leaders from outside the province addressed students in the UP: thus S.S. Batliwala, in the course of his tour of the province in October–November 1938, addressed the Almora District Students Federation and Allahabad students.[61] In Ballia, a local Communist leader Vishwanath Prasad Mardana, took keen interest in the student movement.[62]

The impact of Communist propaganda on students in Benares was especially noteworthy. They organized a "Russian Revolution Week" in November 1937, during which lectures were organized daily. The proceedings were expectedly dominated by Communist leaders. Students of the Kashi Vidyapith and BHU constituted the bulk of the audience.[63] Inspired by Communist teachings, students of the BHU made occasional forays into the adjoining countryside and delivered anti-zamindar speeches,[64] thus contributing to the enthusiasm around the UP Tenancy Bill.

Socialists, Royists and Youth League organizers also showed some interest in student affairs. The first UP students conference held in November 1937 was presided over by Kamladevi Chattopadhyay, prominent Socialist leader from Madras Presidency.[65] M.R. Masani, while speaking to students in Almora in May 1937, urged them to form a union as part of the AISF.[66] But the Socialists

[58] *PAI UP*, No. 36/1937, 4–11 September, p. 575.

[59] *PAI UP*, No. 13/1937, week ending 3 April, p. 272; No. 30/1937, 24–31 July, p. 540.

[60] Dr Mulk Raj Anand addressed Allahabad students during the student week in early November 1938. *PAI UP*, No. 45/1937, 29 October–5 November, p. 202.

[61] *PAI UP*, No. 41/1938, 1–8 October, p. 262 and No. 44/1938, 22–29 October, p. 284 respectively.

[62] He organized a conference of students of Ballia District in August 1938, to which prominent ex-terrorists and other Communist leaders were invited. *PAI UP*, No. 34/1938, 13–20 August, p. 210.

[63] *PAI UP*, No. 46/1937, 13–20 November, p. 634.

[64] Some of these students were: Rustamji Satin, Sheo Mangal Singh and Nanak Ram Chamar. *PAI UP*, No. 49/1939, 4–11 December, p. 654.

[65] *The Leader*, 11 November 1937, p. 11.

[66] *PAI UP*, No. 22/1937, 29 May–5 June, p. 402.

believed in keeping student politics separate from partisan political activity.[67]

Royists, Communists and Youth Leaguers apparently did not share this belief. Nor did the ex-revolutionary terrorists, towards whom the students were greatly attracted. The released Kakori and Lahore Conspiracy prisoners were pleased with the enthusiastic receptions given to them by students in Allahabad, Kanpur, Benares, Jaunpur, Gonda and Saharanpur. In the latter two towns, schoolboys constituted the bulk of the crowd.[68]

Soon, a symbiotic relationship was established between students and the ex-terrorists. The influence of ex-revolutionary terrorists and Communists was evident in the rash of student strikes that suddenly erupted during November–December 1937.[69] The issues varied from college to college—in some cases the demand was for a reduction of tuition fees.[70] In one case students even went on a rampage at a cinema-house in Lucknow demanding concessional rates for non-students.[71] The rustication of two students of

[67] An AICSP circular of 4 June 1936 explained:

> The first [point] is that most of the work of forming and developing student Leagues must be undertaken by the students themselves. Student organizations with 'outsiders' as bosses have been brought into existence and have died a natural death over and over again. While the inspiration may no doubt be derived from outside, the main initiative and the building up must be undertaken by the actual students themselves.... Clearly allied to this point is the one that, while student organizations should undoubtedly participate in the political life of the country, they should be non-party organizations. We should therefore as strongly resist attempts made by our own members to 'captures' [*sic*] or control these organizations as we should resist similar attempts made by members of other groups. *JP Papers*, File No. 5, pp. 21–22.

[68] In Kanpur, students of the B.N. and D.A.V. Colleges were prominent in the processions held for the Kakori prisoners. *PAI UP*, No. 34/1937, 21–28 August, p. 561. For Benaras, see *PAI UP*, No. 35/1937, 28 August–4 September, p. 569; for Jaunpur, See *PAI UP*, No. 38/1937, 18–25 September, p. 586; for Gonda and Saharanpur see *PAI UP*, No. 41/1937, 9–16 October, p. 602.

[69] *The Leader*, reporting on 19 November 1937 remarked: "The strike fever, which has been raging here since the last week end, seems to be assuming an epidemic form." p. 10.

[70] *Ibid*.

[71] *PAI UP*, No. 38/1937, 18–25 September, p. 587.

Lucknow University provoked a general strike in November 1937.[72] For students of Ewing Christian College, Allahabad, the provocation was the refusal of the authorities to permit the national flag to be flown on the college building.[73] The strike spread to other schools and colleges in the vicinity and was finally withdrawn only on obtaining an assurance from the authorities that the national flag could be flown, at least over Allahabad University.[74]

The *Congress Socialist* newspaper lauded this "new awakening" among the students.[75] Jawaharlal Nehru was not too enthused and made clear his disapproval of this frequent resort to strikes by students.[76] But he also assumed the role of arbiter between students and the authorities. The flag controversy at Allahabad was finally brought to a close with the hoisting of the national flag on top of the university building by Nehru himself.[77]

Throughout the ministry period students remained politically active, involving themselves in various political events. In the 1938 Independence Day celebrations, students participated with confidence. While in Lucknow some schools remained closed for the day, at other places pressure was put on the authorities to close institutions. Where the authorities would not yield, students were persuaded to walk out of their classes.[78] Processions of students marched through the streets of Ballia and Bareilly.

As for other spheres of political activity, the Kanpur unit of the AISF claimed to have participated in the literacy programme launched by Congress in late 1938.[79] They had apparently succeeded in making 325 adults literate.[80]

72 *The Leader*, 29 November 1937, p. 10.

73 *The Leader*, 19 November 1937, p. 10.

74 *The Leader*, 21 November 1937, p. 4; 24 November, p. 17 and 27 November, p. 5.

75 *The Congress Socialist*, 4 December 1937, p. 16.

76 *The Leader*, 20 November 1937, p. 13.

77 *PAI UP*, No. 5/1938, 21–28 January, p. 31.

78 *Ibid*.

79 *AICC*/20/1940. Letter from T.R. Chaturvedi to J.B. Kripalani, 27 October 1940. For further details of this literacy programme, see Visalakshi Menon, "The Indian National Congress and Mass Mobilisation: A Case Study of the U.P., 1937–39", *Studies in History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1980, p. 129.

80 Letter from S.P. Bhasin on behalf of the Cawnpore District Student Conference to Jayaprakash Narayan, dated 11 August 1939, *JP Papers* (Ist Instalment), Subject file 154, p. 25.

Owing to their close links with the ex-revolutionary terrorists, students were in the forefront of the agitation for releasing further categories of political prisoners. The release of Ramesh Chandra Sinha and S.S. Bhattacharya, Communists convicted under Central Government rules, was demanded by student organizations all over the province.[81] At the Rohilkhand Divisional Students' Conference held at Bareilly in August 1939 a resolution was passed condemning the Bengal and Punjab Governments for not releasing the political prisoners.[82]

Students at Benares were so closely involved with Congress affairs that they began taking sides in the local factional politics as well. When the DCC took action against Sheopujan Tripathi, a Congress Socialist, for his alleged errant behaviour, students took up his cause and expressed full sympathy with Tripathi.[83]

In August 1938, a committee appointed by the Congress government recommended that students below the age of 18 be debarred from political work.[84] This was greeted with cries of protest. The ministry, which had never ranked high in the eyes of the students, now became highly suspect. Students were driven more firmly into the revolutionaries' camp. Already sceptical of non-violence as an effective tactic for achieving independence, they now desired to create a Russian-type revolution in India.[85]

By late 1938–early 1939, however, the students of the UP were experiencing a sense of drift—there were complaints that no major leaders had time for them.[86] Meanwhile, communal forces had gained entry into the student movement. The Independence Day

[81] 10 September 1938 was observed as "Sinha-Bhattacharya Day" and meetings were held in several places. The Congress Socialists were also associated with the observance of this day. *PAI UP*, No. 38/1938, 10–17 September, p. 241.

[82] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1939, 12–19 August, p. 222.

[83] At a students' meeting indignation was expressed at the alleged Congress attempt to remove Socialists from their ranks. *PAI UP*, No. 37/1938, 3–10 September, p. 233.

[84] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1938, 13–20 August, p. 210.

[85] *Ibid*.

[86] Murshid Ali Khan, a student from Kanpur, wrote complainingly to M.N. Roy in September 1938: "There was a time when everyone whether Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru or Subhas Bose talked of us in appreciative terms. We were the rising hopes of India.... But these words are heard no more. We are no longer dear to them. With the coming of power into their hands we

celebrations of 1939 were marked by widespread student participation but the occasion also revealed the extent to which communalism had set in. It was reported from Allahabad, Kanpur, Dehradun and Ballia that Muslim students took no part in the celebrations. Flag-hoisting became a controversial issue: some Muslim students resented the hoisting of Congress flags at their institutions. They demanded that a Muslim League flag be flown alongside. In Unnao, some students took out a black flag demonstration when denied permission to hoist the Muslim League flag on Independence Day.[87] One wonders whether the feeling of neglect mentioned earlier drove some students into the League camp—especially since the latter could exercise a powerful influence on formative minds.

In Allahabad, Gorakhpur, Gonda and Ballia, rival Muslim Students Federations had come into existence by August–September 1938.[88] In practically every case the guiding spirit was the secretary of the local Muslim League. By the beginning of 1939, there were adequate numbers to hold a provincial-level meeting of the Muslim Students Federation.[89] Three months later, on 1 April 1939, a 1,000 strong meeting was held at Aligarh under the chairmanship of the Raja of Mahmudabad.[90] The Muslim League had even made inroads into areas where there had been no organized student movement until then, for example, Pilibhit and Etawah.[91] The holding of congregational prayers in schools by Muslim students became popular. If the idea was to provoke others, their efforts met with some success: at a school in Pilibhit, Hindu students retaliated

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have been shunned like the plague." *M.N. Roy Papers*, Roll 10, Correspondence with the League of Radical Congressmen, U.P. 3.

[87] *PAI UP*, No. 5/1939, 21–28 January, p. 20.

[88] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1938, 13–20 August p. 210 for Gonda, where the secretary of the local Muslim League had formed the Muslim Students Federation, *PAI UP*, No. 35/1938, 20–27 August, p. 217 for Ballia, *PAI UP*, No. 36/1938, 27 August–3 September, p. 225 for Allahabad and *PAI UP*, No. 38/1938, 10–17 September, p. 241 for Gorakhpur.

[89] See *PAI UP*, No. 2/1939, 31 December–7 January, p. 10. The meeting was held in Gorakhpur.

[90] *PAI UP*, No. 5/1939, 25 March–1 April, p. 79.

[91] See *PAI UP*, No. 35/1938, 20–27 August, p. 217 for Pilibhit and *PAI UP*, No. 37/1938, 27 August–3 September, p. 225 for Etawah. In the latter district even teachers of the Government Intermediate College were becoming communalized.

with the singing of *bhajans*. This triggered off a counter-reaction from the Muslim students to which the Hindu activists threatened "fitting" replies.[92]

It was indeed unfortunate that the student movement, given its radical orientation and exposure to secularism fell prey to communalism. In Lucknow the student movement was, by 1940, clearly divided into pro-Congress and pro-Muslim League camps.[93] It would be wrong to assume, however, that all Muslim students went into the latter—indeed, most remained within the nationalist fold.[94] Students of the UP showed keen interest in the developments at Tripuri and what followed thereafter. There was no doubt about whom they supported: Subhas Bose was the favourite. They had, even in 1938, eagerly responded to Bose's cry of opposing the Federation tooth and nail.[95] Students pledged their support for Bose even after the latter had been expelled from the AICC in August 1939. A Lucknow District Students' Conference, held on 22 September, declared the full confidence of the student community in Bose.[96] At a speech made by K.K. Bhattacharji at Allahabad University in early September, students punctuated the speech with cries of "We want complete independence" and "we want to follow Bose".[97]

Thus, the picture that emerges of student involvement in the politics of the 1937–39 period is one of a highly volatile group thirsting for contact with major parties, eager to be included in all political activity and resentful of any restraining influences. The province's pro-Left sympathies were reflected in the student movement. Indeed, the Student Federation of the UP faithfully reproduced all the shades of provincial and national-level politics. We have noted the growing communalization by 1939 as also the support given to Subhas Bose. By 1940, cleavages within the Left camp would have their repercussions as well. The pro-Communist and pro-CSP groups were to part ways as a result of a split in the AISF in December 1940.

[92] *PAI UP*, No. 35/1938, 20–27 August, p. 217.

[93] Interview with Rameshwar Prasad Misra, Lucknow, April 1986.

[94] Interview with M.H. Jafar, Lucknow, April 1986.

[95] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1938, 13–20 August, p. 210.

[96] *PAI UP*, No. 39/1939, 16–23 September, p. 253.

[97] *PAI UP*, No. 38/1939, 9–16 September, p. 24.

The post-1940 period was politically a most fruitful one for students as will be seen later in this book. Their role in the Quit India Movement was the climactic moment, bringing to a peak the politicization process begun in the 1920s and greatly accelerated during the 1930s.

The Volunteer Movement

The Congress volunteer organization too, like the Youth Leagues and Students' Federation, drew its strength from the youth.[98] However, the Seva Dals (as the volunteer units were more popularly known) were much more a part of mainstream Congress activity. At the time of the 1939 Tripuri crisis when Subhas Bose formed his Forward Bloc, the Seva Dals, unlike youth organizations, did not even momentarily come under the influence of Bose.

The tradition of establishing volunteer corps was a relatively old one in the Congress.[99] Volunteer units, which represented the task force of the Congress, had first emerged in the course of the Non-Cooperation Movement. By November 1921, there were 90,000 volunteers in the UP, covering 36 districts.[100] Even after the Non-Cooperation Movement they remained an integral part of the Congress. They were entrusted with the job of organizing annual Congress sessions and provincial political conferences. Consequently volunteers had the opportunity to observe major Congress leaders at close quarters and to be witness to important deliberations at these sessions.[101]

Volunteers were more steeped in the nationalist ethos than other Congress workers—for they were frequently away from their homes, in training camps where caste and religious divisions were sought to be obliterated.

[98] According to the Premier, G.B. Pant, those who could not pay four annas as Congress membership could become Congress volunteers. *SWGBP*, Vol. 7, p. 178.

[99] They were put together in a coherent fashion in 1923 at the Kakinada Congress under N.S.Hardiker. See Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, pp. 120–21.

[100] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, p. 36.

[101] Interview with Shiv Adhar Misra, Unnao, April 1986.

But the vicissitudes of the national movement had a direct bearing on the Congress volunteer organization. Like other ancillary units of the Congress, Seva Dals too disintegrated in the course of mass movements, partly because they got absorbed into these movements and partly due to governmental repression. The revival was often a slow process. Indeed, it was when the prospect of a fresh mass movement loomed large on the horizon, that the tempo of volunteering quickened.[102]

Volunteer activity in the late 1930s adhered to this pattern. There were hardly any Seva Dals in the UP in the uncertain years of 1935, 1936 and 1937. It was only in Aligarh that, from May 1937 onwards, some signs of interest in volunteering were displayed. This was largely owing to the efforts of Nand Kumar Deo Bashisht, a local Congressman and CSP member, who was even put in charge of organizing an all-India volunteers' training camp in December 1938.[103]

Bashisht set up a volunteer camp in Aligarh in late September 1937.[104] But enthusiasm alone could not sustain the effort—financial constraints told heavily on the movement. Funds had to come from the DCC which was financially crippled at this time.[105] By February 1938 the 40-odd volunteers being trained in Aligarh had to resort to a fund-raising campaign to maintain themselves.[106] These efforts were not successful, apparently, for by the end of March, according to police reports, they flatly refused to perform their duties, that is, the patrolling of riot-torn parts of the city at night.[107]

Volunteering suddenly acquired importance in the province after February 1938. The brief resignation of the ministry in the UP over

[102] The Hindustani Seva Dal was formed in 1928 to provide Congress with a disciplined cadre for a civil disobedience movement. Zareer Masani, "Radical Nationalism in India" p. 13. Even during the Civil Disobedience Movement, volunteer bodies were coming into existence, for example, in Rae Bareli. Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, p. 41. The pattern was repeated in late 1939–40, on the eve of the Individual Satyagraha Movement.

[103] *Home Poll*, 4/2/39, "Note on the Volunteer Activity in India", Report for December 1938.

[104] *PAI UP*, No. 21/1937, 22–29 May, p. 376.

[105] Many DCCs were unable to hold routine political conferences in 1937, not to speak of funding the volunteer movement.

[106] *PAI UP*, No. 38/1937, 18–25 September, p. 584.

[107] *PAI UP*, No. 13/1938, 19–26 March, p. 81.

the political prisoners' issue and the consequent uncertainty provided the impetus. It may be recalled that an attempt at introducing the much-criticized Federation Scheme under the 1935 Act was also made at this time.[108] Congress would have to fight this attempt and there was a general feeling that the next confrontation with the British Government was at hand. To meet these challenges, the volunteer movement grew apace.

In distant Azamgarh, Raghunath Rai, a local Congressman, voiced the need for *khaddar* volunteers in February 1938. He expected every village to provide at least 50 recruits, who could be taught drill and who would be prepared to "fight" the British Government.[109] The suggestion was taken up by the Azamgarh DCC which, in a circular, instructed all the Mandal Congress Committees (MCCs) to make arrangements for volunteer training. The requirement of volunteers from each village was scaled down to five. Each Mandal Committee was directed to amass sufficient provisions to feed the volunteers during their training period.[110] These volunteers would be provided with *khaddar* uniforms.

In north-western UP, volunteer work was begun in Dehradun in March 1938 under the guidance of Royist, Kalyan Kumar Sinha. Here too, each volunteer was provided with a uniform. Funds were raised to feed them.[111]

Almost at the same time, preparations for volunteer training were afoot in Kanpur as well. A training camp in Jajmau, which began work with a hundred recruits in April, received good support from labour leaders like Balkrishna Sharma and Arjun Arora and ex-terrorists like Rajendra Dutt Nigam and Raj Kumar Sinha as well as from traditional Congressmen like Ganga Sahai

[108] While the first part of the 1935 Act related to provincial autonomy, the second part, held in abeyance in 1937, intended to create a Federal Legislature consisting of a Council of State and Federal Assembly. See Government of India Act 1935, Chapter 2, p. 12. For the Congress, the Federal proposals were objectionable because they attempted to bring in the princely states, represented by their highly despotic rulers, as a counterweight to the Congress in the legislatures.

For attempts at the introduction of a Federation in 1938, see Lord Linlithgow's speech at the dinner hosted at Bengal Club on 5 January 1938, *Speeches of Marquess of Linlithgow*, Vol. 2, Simla, 1944, p. 346.

[109] *PAI UP*, No. 6/1938, for week ending 5 February, p. 38.

[110] *PAI UP*, No. 13/1938, 19–26 March, p. 87.

[111] *PAI UP*, No. 12/1938, 12–19 March, p. 73.

Chaube.[112] On April 13, Jallianwala Bagh Day celebrations in Kanpur opened with a procession led by HSD volunteers.[113] Indeed, this district spared no efforts to develop its volunteer movement. It was hoped that the number of recruits would steadily increase so that, by the end of the year, Kanpur would have at least 1,500 trained men. To meet this target, a quota of 100 volunteers from each ward was fixed.[114] Military training was imparted with the help of two ex-army men: one wonders how Gandhi would have reacted to this. This trend certainly caused the Governor to feel alarmed, as is evident from his conversation with G.B. Pant on the matter in December 1938.[115] In any case, the volunteers were popularly perceived as the army of the Congress. This was despite Gandhi's repeated entreaties that the movement should not acquire military overtones.[116] Yet, it became convenient for Congressmen to project the Seva Dals as "Congress Senas". This was particularly so from mid-1938 onwards when the possibility of a second World War loomed large on the horizon and the efforts of the British authorities to recruit soldiers for the army were stepped up. Some in the Congress felt that they could only counter the government's recruitment effort by placing an alternative before the people. The Congress Sena or Volunteer Corps became this alternative. Perhaps in the general mood that prevailed in the late 1930s, militant nationalism rather than peaceful Gandhian methods seemed to be more attractive. When speakers like Parmanand urged people to join the Volunteer Corps, they made out a case for a nationalist army which would one day challenge the British troops on the battlefield.[117]

[112] *PAI UP*, No. 14/1938, week ending 2 April, p. 89 and No. 15/1938, 2–9 April, p. 97.

[113] *PAI UP*, No. 16/1938, 9–16 April, p. 102.

[114] *Ibid*.

[115] From Haig's memorandum of 6 December 1938 to Lord Linlithgow, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1. Haig was worried about Pant's leniency towards the volunteer movement, despite the "militant spirit" that the movement was evidencing.

[116] *PAI UP*, No. 23/1938, for week ending 4 June, p. 140. The occasion was a village-level meeting in Asoha, Unnao District, where the audience was asked to enroll in a "Congress Army".

[117] *PAI UP*, No. 33/1938, 6–13 August, p. 201. See also speeches by Chheda Lal, Ram Chandra Singh and Girdhar Singh at Aligarh in May 1939, asking

However, to expect that those wishing to enlist in the British army would opt for the Congress Seva Dals instead was naive. In monetary terms, the two could not be compared. But for those already inclined towards nationalism and service of the motherland, volunteer training with a concrete programme of regular drill, uniforms and parades must have appeared an attractive prospect. Volunteer work also channelized the energies of the illiterate youth of the province towards nationalism.[118]

Consciously too, the volunteer movement was linked with the effort at creating a parallel government. Congress speakers sometimes explained to their audience that the Congress volunteer sena would, in due course of time, replace the police.[119] With panchayats proliferating throughout the province and even posing a serious challenge to the local administration, these statements must have sounded adequately convincing.[120]

The political education of the volunteers was taken care of through speeches by prominent leaders who spoke on socialism, communism and international politics.[121] Volunteers could also be put to useful work such as restoring the confidence of the people after communal riots.[122]

During May–July 1938, more areas were covered by volunteer work: namely Bareilly and Etawah in western UP and Banda in

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for "five young men from each village who would be trained as officers to command forces against the British Government". *PAI UP*, No. 22/1939, 20–27 May, p. 125.

[118] This was suggested by Raghupat Sharma, a freedom fighter from Gonda, who joined the Volunteer Corps in the 1930s as an illiterate village youth (interviewed on 21 April 1986 at Lucknow).

[119] *PAI UP*, No. 29/1938, 9–16 July, p. 177. In Azamgarh and Meerut the propaganda was that the volunteers would, in time, replace the police force which would then be abolished.

[120] *PAI UP*, No. 17/1938, 16–23 April, p. 108 reported that Congress panchayats were active in Banda, Ballia, Hamirpur, Sitapur and Fyzabad. *PAI UP*, No. 19/1938, 1–7 May reported similar developments in Gorakhpur, Aligarh, Muzaffarnagar and Barabanki, pp. 117–18. Bijnor, Hamirpur, Bahraich, Pratapgarh and several other districts reported panchayat formations as well in the course of 1938.

[121] *PAI UP*, No. 17/1938, 16–23 April, p. 108. This camp which was organized at Kanpur, came to an end on 10 May 1938 with the distribution of certificates by Parmanand, the renowned revolutionary.

[122] *PAI UP*, No. 13/1938, 19–26 March, p. 81.

the south-central region.[123] In areas which had a longer history of volunteering, those trained at the first camps were sent out to organize more camps, each in his local *mandals*. Such organizers were, in local parlance, known as "sardars".

Eastern UP, hitherto represented only by Azamgarh, also now began participating more actively in the effort. Jaunpur (under Ram Naresh Singh, MLA), Gorakhpur (under Shibbanlal Saksena, MLA) as well as Allahabad, the cradle of the UP Congress, became witness to fairly vigorous volunteer activity. In Gorakhpur, Shibbanlal Saksena had put the target for volunteering at a rather ambitious figure of 1 lakh.[124]

By September 1938, a more serious and sustained attempt to organize volunteering was afoot. The Munich crisis, which brought Europe to the brink of war, obviously had a contributory effect. In western UP, the older centres, that is, Aligarh, Meerut, Etawah and Dehradun, were now joined by Jhansi (under B.D. Dhulekar),[125] Etah, Budaun, Bareilly, Bijnor, Mathura, Farukhabad and Agra,[126] while in the central region Lucknow, Hamirpur, Fatehpur, Pratapgarh, Fyzabad, Unnao and Hardoi joined the fray.[127] Eastern UP presented a relatively static picture: the only change being the addition of Ghazipur (where there was some slight volunteer activity)[128] and Ballia to the existing tally of Azamgarh, Jaunpur and Allahabad. By this time the PCC was taking an active interest in the campaign.[129] By making frequent requests to volunteer

[123] *PAI UP*, No. 22/1938, 21–28 May; No. 23/1938, week ending 24 June and No. 30/1938, 16–23 July.

[124] *PAI UP*, No. 28/1938, 2–9 July, p. 170; No. 30/1938, 16–23 July, p. 188; and No. 34/1938, 13–20 August, p. 206.

[125] *PAI UP*, No. 39/1938, 17–24 September, p. 245.

[126] *PAI UP*, No. 44/1938, 22–29 October, p. 282; No. 48/1938, 19–26 November, p. 311; and No. 30/1938, 16–23, July, p. 183.

[127] *PAI UP*, No. 35/1938, 20–27 August, p. 213; No. 37/1938, 3–10 September, p. 229; and No. 39/1938, 17–24 September, p. 245.

[128] In September 1938, an appeal was made for Congress volunteers in Ghazipur. On November 6 of the same year a training camp was opened in this district. *PAI UP*, No. 37/1938 and No. 46/1938, 5–12 November, p. 297. At the Ayodhya Political Conference held in December 1938, a decision was taken to increase the strength of the Congress Volunteer Corps. *The National Herald*, 4 October 1938, p. 6.

[129] In April 1939 a survey of the whole volunteering effort was carried out by the UPCC. At the Executive Council meeting of the Committee held in

organizers to enrol Muslims in large numbers, the PCC was hoping to promote the Muslim mass contacts campaign as well.[130] All this led the Governor of the UP to describe the volunteer movement as "the most disquieting feature at the moment" (November 1938) in the province.[131]

In the course of the following year, that is, 1939, all the remaining districts, namely, Shajahanpur, Ballia, Mirzapur, Mainpuri, Gonda, Bahraich, Pilibhit, Muzaffarpur, Jalaun and Rae Bareli were also brought on the volunteering map.[132] Practically every district organized training camps and in places such as Aligarh several such camps were held. However, the numbers trained, especially in the remoter districts, were unimpressive—ranging from 25 to 40. The expectations had been much greater.[133] Yet, by mid-1939 there were roughly 18,000 volunteers in the UP. Intelligence reports expressed alarm at the extent to which the volunteer movement had "caught on" in the province. Not only the UP far ahead of other provinces in this respect, but the quality of the volunteers trained was reported to be "impressive".[134] Nor was the effort impeded by lack of funds. The DCCs now played a major role in financing the movement.[135]

The post-Tripuri uncertainty which affected practically every other sphere of Congress activity in 1939 did not seriously disrupt the work of the Seva Dals. While local and district-level leaders were preoccupied with defining their positions vis-à-vis Subhas Bose, volunteer camps continued to be held, though on a more

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this month a decision to change the name of the volunteer corps from Qaumi Sena to Qaumi Seva Dal was adopted. *The National Herald*, 8 April 1939, p. 5.

[130] *PAI UP*, No. 36/1938, 20–27 August, p. 213.

[131] Haig to Linlithgow, 22 November 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[132] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1939, 14–21 January, p. 18; No. 6/1939, 28 January–4 February, p. 29; No. 8/1939, 11–18 February, p. 38; No. 13/1939, 18–25 March, pp. 68–69; and No. 31/1939, 22–29 July, p. 198.

[133] Each district planned to train volunteers in thousands. For instance, the target at Mathura was 6,500, Pratapgarh hoped to get 200 volunteers from each Mandal. *PAI UP*, No. 34/1938, 13–20 August, p. 206; and No. 35/1938, 20–27 August, p. 213.

[134] *Home Poll*, 4/2/39, Notes on the Volunteer Movement in India, report dated 24 June 39.

[135] As for instance in Ballia, *PAI UP*, No. 45/1938, 29 October–5 November, p. 289.

modest scale, through April–August 1939.[136] From October 1939, however, there was a sudden quickening of tempo. Indeed, training and organization of volunteer corps was to become a major form of Congress mobilization after the Congress ministries resigned from office.[137]

There is no doubt that the Congress volunteer programme during the tenure of the ministry was a rather successful one. Indeed, so successful was it, that rival organizations like the Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha and the Khaksars also began resorting to their own forms of volunteer training in a bid to undermine Congress efforts. Thus, approximately at the same time that the Congress volunteering programme gained momentum, that is, around September 1938, the Muslim League National Guard and the Mahabir Dal of the Hindu Mahasabha were in evidence.[138] Volunteers of the latter organization were involved in agitation around the alleged ill-treatment of Hindus in the state of Hyderabad. Several batches of such volunteers were sent to offer *satyagraha* in Hyderabad. Indeed, in the process, some Hindu Congressmen appear to have switched allegiances and joined the Mahabir Dals.[139] Almost in retaliation, Muslim Khaksars from the Punjab began entering the UP with the intention of embarrassing the ministry by creating problems of law and order.[140]

Thus volunteering during the tenure of the ministry acquired a dimension never reached before. The increasingly militant mood which grew during those years was physically manifested in the

[136] Some of the centres were Jaunpur (*PAI UP*, No. 15/1939, 25 March–1 April, p. 79); Meerut and Fatehpur (*PAI UP*, No. 19/1939, 29 April–6 May, p. 106); Bahraich (*PAI UP*, No. 24/1939, 3–10 June, p. 147); Fatehpur Sikri and Agra (*PAI UP*, No. 29/1939, 8–15 July, p. 185); Gonda (*PAI UP*, No. 31/1939, 22–29 July, p. 198); Mathura (*PAI UP*, No. 33/1939, 5–12 August, p. 214 and No. 36/1939, 26 August–2 September, p. 235). See also *The National Herald*, 4 October 1939, p. 6.

[137] See Chapters 8 and 9 of this book.

[138] *PAI UP*, No. 35/1938, 20–27 August, p. 213; No. 38/1938, 10–17 September, p. 238 and No. 1/1939, for fortnight ending 31 December 1938, p. 5.

[139] One such individual was Raghupat Sharma of Gonda. Interview conducted on 21 April 1986 at Lucknow.

[140] *PAI UP*, No. 26/1939, 17–24 June, p. 159; No. 28/1939, 1–8 July, p. 178; No. 35/1939, 19–26 August, p. 229.

growth of rival volunteer groups which occasionally even clashed with each other.[141]

What emerges quite clearly from this account is that there was a surge of mass activity during the tenure of the ministry. The newly acquired political space was rapidly filled up. Diverse trends emerged. In the case of the revolutionary terrorists, these were the years of transition, when they emerged from their cloak-and-dagger existence and participated in open political forums. But the revival of underground activity was also on their agenda. This was an extremely beneficial period for them, since they were not constantly being hounded by the police. They even found themselves being accepted in the Congress organizational fold. As for the students, guidance and support came from various political quarters. Communists, members of the CSP, Royists and the ex-revolutionary terrorists were all vying to capture this constituency. As a result school and college students were on a high—agitating on the smallest pretext. Of course, their nationalist sensibilities were also being developed and one can see the build-up to their involvement in the Quit India Movement. The divisive forces which were also making inroads into student organizations provided cause for alarm but this was only a symptom of the larger political forces at work in the province.

The volunteer movement of these years was a rather impressive one. It picked up momentum in 1938 and managed to channelize the energies of the rural youth towards nationalism. Like the Youth Leagues, it survived the organizational disruption after the resignation of the ministries and helped to keep the national movement in a state of preparedness until the Quit India Movement.

[141] There is a reference to heightened tension between Ahrar and Khaksar volunteers in Barabanki in *PAI UP*, No. 35/1939. Government reports classified five volunteer organizations by June 1939: (*a*) Congress (18,000 in the UP); (*b*) Hindustani Seva Dal and other voluntary bodies; (*c*) Muslim League (15,000 in the UP); (*d*) Ahrars (2,000 in the UP); and (*e*) Khaksars. *Home Poll*, 4/2/39.

FOUR

An Amicable Existence: The UP Congress Socialist Party, 1937–39

The Congress Socialist Party was, from its earliest days, a major influence on politics in the UP.[1] The programmes and policies of the UPCC bore close resemblance to the aims and objectives of the CSP after 1934. While attempting to redefine the Congress agenda, the CSP in the UP continued to work within the Congress organization. The most important CSP leader, Acharya Narendra Dev, was a much-respected leader of the province and the Premier, G.B. Pant, was even anxious to include him in the Cabinet. In the UP, the Socialists were not at war with the Congress, nor did they attempt to build a parallel movement outside it, though there were individual cases of conflict between Socialists and local Congressmen, as we shall see.

A careful study of the UP Congress Socialist Party (UPCSP) would help provide a better understanding of Congress–CSP

[1] Benares was the earliest centre of CSP activity in the UP. Here, in early 1934, student branches had been set up in the BHU and Kashi Vidyapith. In May 1934 local units of the CSP were set up in Allahabad and in Kanpur in June 1934. The UPCSP was formally launched at Kanpur in September 1934. Zareer Masani, "Radical Nationalism in India 1930–42", unpublished Thesis, Oxford University, 1976, p. 68.

relations than is available at present.[2] In order to do so, some basic questions regarding the nature of the UPCSP must be posed. What, for instance, were its defining characteristics? What was the extent of the CSP's hold over the districts of the province? What were the broad areas of the party's work and to what extent were the initial objectives realized?

Nature of the Organization

The UP branch of the CSP had a distinct character. To begin at a superficial level, while most of the founder-members of the All-India Congress Socialist Party (AICSP) were young, being either in their twenties or thirties, CSP leaders in the UP were older, being largely in their forties or even fifties.[3] The leaders in the UP had

[2] Early studies of the CSP like that of Thomas Rusch and Hari Kishore Singh tended to see the rise of the CSP as a reaction to the "compromising" tendencies of the Gandhian programme. Thomas A. Rusch in his "Role of the CSP in the INC", unpublished Thesis, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1955, p. 126 describes the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement as "a safety-valve against the coming to power of the 'Left-Wing' who might have tried to channel the movement into violent revolutionary action along the lines of the Russian Revolution. In so doing, he [Gandhi] hoped also to obtain as many concessions from the British as possible", p. 166.

Hari Kishore Singh maintains that the Congress attitude to peasant ferment was never more than one of lukewarm interest. "There was always the greatest reluctance to lead the peasantry against the Zamindars in Bengal, Bihar and the UP, where landlordism was deeply entrenched." Hari Kishore Singh, *The Praja Socialist Party 1934–59*, Lucknow, 1959, p. 12.

The same theme is reiterated in Zareer Masani's "Radical Nationalism in India" In the context of the Civil Disobedience campaign, he asserts that despite "some overlapping" between the nationalist campaigns and peasant and labour militancy, the conservatism of the Gandhian leadership ruled out any systematic effort to integrate the political campaign with radical mass demands. p. 13.

Leftist historians have had a somewhat condescending approach to the CSP, treating them as pretenders or opportunists, lacking the commitment of the Communists: "most of the CSP founder-fathers were to have extremely chequered and by no means consistently leftist political careers in the future." Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885–1947*, p. 333.

[3] Of the founder members of the CSP were Jayaprakash Narayan and Yusuf Meherally (both born in 1902), Achyut Patwardhan (born in 1905), Asoka

obviously opted for Congress Socialism only after having experimented with other forms of political activity. This gave their politics a distinctive character, which we shall try to capture in the following pages. Sumit Sarkar's assertion that "much of the (CSP's) support was purely opportunistic, coming from groups with factional quarrels with the established Congress leadership at various levels"[4] is an oversimplification if not virtually without basis. We would rather maintain that entry into the CSP enabled many activists to carry on their earlier forms of work in a more meaningful manner. But precisely for this reason it became somewhat difficult for the party to maintain a broad unity of action at the all-India or even provincial level.

If Jayaprakash Narayan was the prime spokesman and guiding force of the AICSP, in the UP unit it was Acharya Narendra Dev who played the corresponding role. Born in 1889 at Sitapur, he practiced law in Fyzabad until 1921. His early political mentors were Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Hardyal. He was Secretary of the Home Rule League in Fyzabad. After the Russian Revolution of 1917 he developed an interest in Marxism. A scholar by nature (he had done his BA in ancient history and then studied archaeology at Benares) and a teacher at the Kashi Vidyapith in the 1920s, the Acharya went on to become one of the most learned exponents of Marxism in India while remaining a true follower of Gandhi.[5] Yet he could not bring himself to become a member of the Communist Party. Like Jayaprakash Narayan, he was dissatisfied with the CPI's extreme dependence on the Comintern. Acharya Narendra Dev emphasized the need to adapt Marxist theory to Indian conditions before it could be applied in India. To expect

Mehta (born in 1911) (23 years and hence the youngest founder-member). M.R. Masani was in his thirties and Rammanohar Lohia, a later addition, was born in 1910. From Hari Kishore Singh, *The Praja Socialist Party 1934–39*, pp. 16–23. Among the leaders of the UP, P.D. Tandon was born in 1882. Sampurnanand in 1889, Balkrishna Sharma in 1897, Acharya Narendra Dev and Damodar Swarup Seth in 1889. S.P. Sen, ed., *Dictionary of National Biography*.

[4] Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885–1947*, p. 333.

[5] In 1934 when Gandhi visited the UP, a delegation of Congress Socialists led by Acharya Narendra Dev met Gandhi at Benares and asked him to use his influence on the Congress executive to adopt the CSP programme. *CWMG*, Vol. 58, p. 253. Narendra Dev also submitted a draft to the Socialist programme to Gandhi for his comments. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

that a Russian revolution could be re-enacted in India was fanciful, he felt.[6] It was this line of argument that won him many adherents in the UP.[7]

The UPCSP was as much a gathering ground for diverse left groups as the all-India body. By 1937, the party had admitted large numbers of Communists to its fold. They were particularly conspicuous in its Allahabad, Benares and Kanpur units. (The Communists were acting in accordance with the resolution of the 1935 Seventh Comintern Congress, directing Communist parties in the member countries to forge "popular fronts".) In Rohilkhand and the Dehradun–Sahranpur belt, Royists could be found in the CSP ranks, though in 1937 itself they had begun disruptive work within the party.[8] After August 1937, released revolutionary terrorists too helped swell the CSP membership. And finally, the majority of the Kisan Sabha activists in the province were UPCSP members as well.

Most of the groups listed here retained their separate identities while becoming members of the CSP. To this extent, the party was more like a front or a broad platform with all the unevennesses often to be found in such organizations. However, there was an inner core to the party consisting of those Congressmen who came directly to the CSP. The typical UP Congress Socialist came from the intelligentsia, the urban middle class or from one of the richer families of the rural hinterland. More often than not, he had a background of university education. The towns of Lucknow, Allahabad and Benares produced a variety of such figures. Sizable numbers also came from Agra, Bareilly and Kanpur. This feature can be easily explained. In India, the dissemination of Western socialist ideas—Fabian, Social Democratic or Marxist—had not gone beyond the major towns in the mid-1930s. Those who were exposed to these ideas became either Communists or Congress Socialists. The former, especially in the UP, had a more Eurocentric

[6] Hari Kishore Singh, *The Praja Socialist Party*, p. 20.

[7] Interview with Chandroday Dikshit (active CSP worker in Lucknow in the 1930s), Lucknow, 22 April 1986.

[8] From April through August 1937 "planned groups" of Royists located in the various provinces of India resigned from the CSP. J.P. Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India, M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy 1920–30*, New Jersey, 1971, pp. 229–32.

approach to politics. This sometimes earned them the contempt of their Congress Socialist comrades who scoffed at the Communists' lack of familiarity with Indian conditions.[9]

By 1937, the district-level leadership of the UPCSP consisted of well-established and widely respected Congressmen. To mention a few names: C.B. Gupta of Lucknow, Algu Rai Shastri of Azamgarh, Vishwanath Chaube of Ballia, Dalsingar Dube of Ghazipur, Swami Bhagwan of Fatehpur, Thakur Malkhan Singh of Aligarh, Sri Prakasa, Sampurnanand, Kamlapati Tripathi, Sheopujan Tripathi and K.D. Malaviya of Benares, Munshi Ishwar Saran of Gonda, Damodar Swarup Seth of Bareilly, Nisar Ahmad Sherwani of Etawah (who had the dubious distinction of having lost two by-elections from Muslim constituencies in the UP) Bishambhar Dayal Tripathi and Jata Shankar Shukla of Unnao, Balkrishna Sharma, Hariharnath Shastri and Rajaram Shastri of Kanpur, Narmada Prasad Singh, R.S. Pandit and Venkatesh Narayan Tewari of Allahabad. Nehru's proteges from the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), Sajjad Zaheer, Z.A. Ahmed and K.M. Ashraf were also part of the organization. Some of these leaders were well-versed in socialist and Marxist theories. Others were not, and becoming members of the CSP brought little change in their strategies of political mobilization, though a certain broadening of perspectives may have occurred. Some had worked among the peasantry or industrial labour even earlier. For them, the CSP was meaningful only to the extent that it emphasized the economic aspects of the anti-imperialist struggle.[10] The new party also offered greater scope for their chosen spheres of activity and thus generated a fresh surge of activism. For a few, like C.B. Gupta of Lucknow, it could be a means of getting the better of a factional

[9] Interview with Chandroday Dikshit, Lucknow, 22 April, 1986.

[10] According to Gyanendra Pandey, "the CSP attracted a bundle of disgruntled elements not necessarily bound by a common ideology.... Many members accepted the general drift of the socialist programme but opposed some of its most important immediate applications.... Others who joined the CSP could not be credited even with a sentimental attachment to socialism". Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, p. 72. Paul Brass points out that most of Purshottamdas Tandon's associates in the peasant movement joined the CSP. One prominent example was Mohanlal Gautam. *Factional Politics in an Indian State*, p. 36.

rival in district-level politics.[11] But these were isolated instances and are not sufficient for a generalization.

Gyanendra Pandey has maintained that:

> 'Socialist' and 'non-Socialist' very quickly became catch-phrases and slogans in a whole range of intra-Congress factional disputes. All but a select group of committed Socialists turned their attention inwards on the Congress. The 'outside' work of mobilizing and organizing the 'masses' waited for another day.[12]

We shall keep these observations in mind when examining the actual work of the CSP in the province.

Since the CSP's primary work was to be amongst Kisans and industrial workers, and to a lesser extent among the students, it was the provincial and district-level Kisan and labour leaders who played the most active role in the UPCSP ranks. Rajaram and Hariharnath Shastri rose to prominence as labour leaders; among the peasants there were Mohanlal Gautam, Swami Bhagwan, Damodar Swarup Seth and B.P. Sinha. The ex-revolutionary terrorist Jogesh Chatterji did substantial work amongst the Kisans and Arjun Arora and Sant Singh alias Muhammad Yusuf amongst the Kanpur workers.

Socialists in the UP had a special relationship with Jawaharlal Nehru, whom they regarded as their mentor. Like Socialists in other parts of the country, they relied on him to incorporate socialist demands into the programme of the Indian National Congress.[13] Subhas Bose was also looked upon as a champion and promoter of the cause by Socialists.[14] However, Bose himself was not greatly impressed by the CSP, which he thought was too much under the influence of Fabian Socialism, which had been "a fashion in England 50 years ago". A modern party, according to him, could not afford to hark back to such an old idea.[15]

[11] In this case the rival was Gopinath Srivastava, who controlled the DCC.

[12] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, p. 72.

[13] Here again Pandey states that Nehru's refusal to join the CSP highlighted the Party's "anomalous situation". *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, p. 72.

[14] This became very clear at the time of the presidential elections to the Tripuri Congress. See section titled "The Bose Factor" in this chapter.

[15] S.C. Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, p. 384.

As mentioned earlier, the UPCC, from 1934 onwards, had acquired a rich socialist hue. A memorandum on mass contact prepared during Acharya Narendra Dev's presidentship of the UPCC in 1936 reads exactly like a CSP document. Emphasis was placed on bringing industrial workers into the Congress organization; on organizing separate Kisan Sabhas, notwithstanding the fact that in the past "our local committees have often functioned as Kisan Sabhas"; on giving trade unions and Kisan Sabhas representation in the Congress, etc.[16] It was also in favour of the abolition of zamindari.[17] Moreover, the UPCC declared uncompromising opposition to the acceptance of office. It participated in the *hartal* of 1 April against the new constitution. All this was notwithstanding the fact that the UPCSP had fielded the maximum number of candidates in the elections to the UP Legislative Assembly, most of whom were successful. The argument was that contesting the elections was one thing and acceptance of office quite another. But by early April 1937,when it became clear that Congress was moving towards acceptance of office, they changed their stance somewhat. Outright opposition to the decision was ruled out and members were asked not to resign their seats. But ministerial offices would not be accepted. "There was no objection, however, to accepting the Presidentship of an Assembly or Council."[18]

Of course the final Congress decision to enter office under the 1935 Act was not welcomed by the Socialists. But they chose not to make an issue of it, realizing that "that there is today an overwhelming opinion in favour of offices".[19] But when G.B. Pant invited Acharya Narendra Dev to join the Cabinet, the latter refused.[20] The CSP had resolved to function as a kind of opposition in the Assembly.

It was the August 1937 police firing on striking Kanpur workers which first brought the Socialists out in open condemnation of the ministry.[21] Socialists in other parts of the country were also feeling

[16] *JP Papers*, Indian National Congress File 116, pp. 103–7.

[17] *Proceedings of Executive Committee* of the UPCC on 18 November 1937.

[18] AICSP Circular letter No. 4, 31-3-1937, *JP Papers*, CSP File No. 2, p. 55.

[19] *Congress Socialist*, 31 July 1937, p. 9.

[20] *SWGBP*, Vol. 7, p. 189.

[21] At a CSP meeting in Allahabad on 9 August 1937, a resolution was passed protesting against the use of Section 144 Cr.P. C., lathi charge and firing in

uncomfortable about the functioning of the ministries. While the tendency to resort to repressive measures was, in the eyes of the CSP, the major drawback of the ministries, there were other unsatisfactory features as well. "Experience of the last four months shows that our ministries cannot function effectively without central political guidance. The unevenness in policies, the compromises on principles are instances to the point."[22] At the Calcutta AICC meeting in October 1937 they placed their misgivings about the functioning of the ministries before their fellow-Congressmen. A resolution to this effect was referred to the Working Committee. The latter promised to draw up a comprehensive scheme for the uniform and coordinated functioning of all the seven Congress ministries.[23] Socialist members regarded this as a success for themselves and were temporarily pacified.

But soon the misgivings reappeared. In December 1937, Achyut Patwardhan wanted to resign from the Congress Working Committee. In a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru he explained that he found it difficult to reconcile his socialism with remaining at the helm of a Congress which offered "very little scope for extra-parliamentary activity".[24] Acharya Narendra Dev too felt that tenets such as "truth" and "non-violence" were being widely misused by those who acted in direct opposition to the declared policy of the Congress. Quite clearly, Narendra Dev's reference was to Congress ministries. He felt that they were resorting to the same repressive measures as previous governments, in the guise of defending truth and non-violence.[25]

Kanpur. The Congress ministry was asked to withdraw these orders immediately. *PAI UP*, No. 32/1937, 7–14 August, p. 548. Similar sentiments were voiced at a Benares Hindu University CSP meeting on 23 August. *PAI UP*, No. 34/1937, 21–28 August, p. 557.

22. *Congress Socialist*, 23 October 1937, p. 5. See also M.R. Masani's article "By Law Established" in the same issue.

[23] *Congress Socialist*, 6 November 1937, p. 8.

[24] Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, dated 10 December 1937, *JN Papers*, Vol. 82, pp. 15–16.

[25] Narendra Dev to Nehru, 10 December 1937, *JN Papers*, Vol. 54, pp. 110–15.

Organizational Work

In the early months of the ministry, very little was done by the UPCSP to widen and deepen its network. This led to a feeling within AICSP ranks that the UP unit was not functioning satisfactorily. A five-member committee was formed to "combine the scattered Socialist elements of our Province in an effective organization with properly functioning central and branch committees".[26] In January 1938 the secretary of the party, Sajjad Zaheer, was reported to be touring the province to "reinvigorate the organisation".[27] The sudden spurt of CSP activity in several districts of western UP in the first half of 1938 and the setting up of district level branches of the party can be attributed to this.[28] Notwithstanding such attempts, the party's functioning remained spasmodic, with occasional bursts of activity when a major leader toured the districts.[29] The inability of the party to generate a momentum from within its ranks was one of the weaknesses of the CSP.[30] This was partly owing to its ambiguous behaviour towards the Congress as a whole. While the Socialist suspicion of the Congress right wing's credentials was constant, the party vacillated between shrill condemnation and restraint. Nor were the members' reactions to the crises uniform, as will be seen later. These ambiguities sapped the vitality of the party, leaving it confused and uncertain. Another disruptive factor was the tendency of cadre-

[26] *Congress Socialist*, 18 November 1937, p. 14 and letter of joint secretary, AICSP, 8 November 1937, *Jayaprakash Narayan Papers*, CSP File 19, p. 8. The Committee consisted of Acharya Narendra Dev, Sampurnanand, Rammanohar Lohia, B.P. Sinha and S.H. Zaheer.

[27] *PAI UP*, No. 3/1938, 8–15 January, p. 17.

[28] Sajjad Zaheer in his interview *Oral History Transcript* (OHT), NMML, p. 95, gives a fairly good idea of his work: "I got lists made of contacts in various districts, through these contacts and through our own contacts we formed units of the CSP. We saw that the district secretaries were elected and in that way, 10, 12 or 15 members were enrolled in many districts of UP."

[29] Thus, in October 1938, there was a fresh spurt of activity with Socialist leaders organizing lectures in several parts of the province, largely in western UP *PAI UP*, No. 42/1938, 8–15 October, p. 265 and *PAI UP*, No. 43/1938, 15–22 October, p. 272.

[30] Sajjad Zaheer, in an interview, had this to say about the CSP organization in the UP: "It had no proper list of our members, our meetings were not properly held...." Interview of Sajjad Zaheer, *OHT*, (NMML), p. 87.

based groups like the Communists and the Royists to exploit the CSP.

In the Provincial Congress organization, the earliest CSP strongholds were Lucknow, Allahabad and Benares. Here too, there were core areas of influence. In Lucknow, there was a clear polarization between the right and left wings, with the Town Congress Committee (TCC) under C.B. Gupta clearly in CSP hands. The DCC was the stronghold of such moderate elements as Gopinath Srivastava, Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier.[31] In Benares, on the other hand, the Socialists controlled the DCC by 1938. Kamalapati Tripathi was the president.[32] Meanwhile, in Allahabad, the TCC had Socialist office-bearers whereas the DCC had none.[33]

Apparently, the TCCs passed more easily into CSP hands than the DCCs. There were two reasons for this: (*a*) The resistance from opposing groups was far less in the case of urban Congress committees. In any case, given the more pronounced rural character of the Congress after the Civil Disobedience Movement, the DCCs were considered more weighty and powerful than the TCCs. However, where the dominant element in a DCC was pro-Socialist, the CSP did gain entry. (*b*) Despite having peasant leaders in their midst, the CSP found it easier to undertake work in the urban areas among workers especially in the unorganized sector, as we shall soon see. This is clearly revealed in the case of Agra.

The city of Agra, dotted with numerous small-scale industrial units, provided ample scope for CSP work.[34] The socialists of Agra began by organizing the municipal sweepers at the beginning of 1937 and obtaining better wages for them from their employers.[35] Soon thereafter, press workers and sugar-factory labourers were

[31] Interview with Rameshwar Prasad Misra (a Lucknow Congressmen and student activist in the 1930s), Lucknow, 23 April 1986.

[32] *M.N. Roy Papers*, Roll No. 9. Letter 4 from Kripa Shankar Sharma, 13 September 1938.

[33] *SWJN*, Vol. 8, p. 229. Letter from Lal Bahadur Shastri to Nehru, 6 March 1938, *JN Papers*, Vol. 93, Part I.

[34] Agra in the early nineteenth century was a flourishing manufacturing centre of inlaid stones, leatherwork, gold thread, indigenous medicines and sweetmeats. C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, Delhi, 1992, p. 206.

[35] *PAI UP*, No. 11/1937, 13–20 March, p. 230 and No. 14/1937, 3–10 April, p. 282.

also unionized.[36] In the rural areas, however, they found their authority challenged. Since Agra had a tradition of Kisan organization going back to the mid-1920s, the initiative in the peasant movement lay in the hands of older, non-socialist Congressmen who controlled the DCC. It was reported that the DCC was encouraging the formation of local-level Kisan Sabhas in April–May 1937 and a District Kisan Sabha was constituted in late April with Parvati Devi as president and Reoti Sharma as Secretary.[37] It resolved to set up branches throughout the district. Tenants were asked to report cases of zamindari oppression in the offices of these Sabhas. Enrolment had also begun and the target for the year was fixed at 4,000 members.[38]

The Socialists were rather resentful of these moves, which, in their view, should have been their own prerogative. They refused to cooperate in the preparations for the district political conference, which were to be held at Fatehpur Sikri in May.[39] Ultimately, when the conference was held on 12 and 13 June, all the Socialists, with the exception of Ram Chandra Paliwal, were conspicuous by their absence.[40] Immediately after this conference, however, the Socialists held a Kisan conference at the same venue where the chief guest was Damodar Swarup Seth, the Bareilly CSP leader and secretary of the UPCC.[41] Speeches at this meeting revealed the Socialists' animosity towards and distrust of local Congressmen.[42]

Rivalry between the DCC members and the Socialists of Agra increased in the following months. The Socialists, whose hands had been strengthened by the entry of Bijay Singh Pathik (the

[36] *PAI UP*, No. 17/1937, 24 April–1 May, p. 314; No. 18/1937, 1–8 May, p. 340; and No. 44/1937, 31 October–6 November, p. 624.

[37] *PAI UP*, No. 17/1937, p. 231. The first local-level Kisan Sabha was formed at Firozabad in June 1937. *PAI UP*, No. 23/1937, 5–12, p. 412. While Parvati Devi had joined the Congress movement during the 1920s, Reoti Saran Sharma was a much older Congressman, having participated in the Swadeshi Movement. *UP Swatamtrata Sangram Ke Sainik*, Vol. 33.

[38] *PAI UP*, No. 21/1937, 22–29 May, p. 373.

[39] The political conference had to be postponed, partly because of this reason and partly due to lack of funds. *PAI UP*, No. 23/1937, 5–12 June, p. 410.

[40] *PAI UP*, No. 24/1937, 12–19 June, pp. 432–33.

[41] *Ibid*.

[42] For instance a remark that the Congress "consisted of all sorts of men" was made to emphasize the need for separate organizations for Kisans. *Ibid*.

erstwhile Bijolia peasant leader and now a full-time Kisan worker in Agra) into their ranks, stepped up their attempts to woo the Kisans. While the Agra DCC issued leaflets asking people to enrol in the Congress Party and "warning" them against the Kisan Sabha which was presumably now in Socialist hands, the CSP urged the Kisans to help it "capture" the Congress Party which, it claimed, had become "a body of capitalists and zamindars" who could not safeguard the interests of Kisans and labourers.[43]

In practical terms, however, there was little difference in the type of Kisan work undertaken by the two groups. Both had, for instance, enrolled one-anna Kisan members.[44] One wonders whether, to Kisan activists at the lower rungs of the political ladder, there was any clearly perceivable difference between Congress Socialists and other Congressmen.

In neighbouring Bareilly, the Socialists controlled the DCC. The influence of Damodar Swarup Seth, a one-time Kakori Conspiracy Case prisoner and now an undisputed district-level leader and an active Socialist, provides adequate explanation for this development. Surprisingly, though, organized CSP activity in the district began as late as 1938 with the setting up of a branch of the party.[45] The Socialists here showed greater interest in urban rather than rural mobilization. While bobbin factory workers were unionized in August 1938, it was reported that by June 1939 efforts were on to set up unions in "practically every branch of labour".[46] In this district, there seems to have existed a small Royist element as well, which claimed to have won over the Left forces to itself by having rendered the CSP "sufficiently useless"[47] in April 1938.

Besides Agra and Bareilly, Mathura, Meerut, Moradabad and Etawah also had branches of the CSP by early 1939. Socialists in Mathura concentrated on Kisan work. Initially they had to break

[43] H.D. Malaviya's speech to students of Agra city, *PAI UP*, No. 42/1938, 8–15 October, pp. 264–65.

[44] See *PAI UP*, No. 23/1937, 5–12 June for Reoti Saran Sharma and Om Prakash's efforts to enrol one-anna Kisan members on behalf of the DCC. For the Socialists' enrolment of one-anna Kisan members see, *PAI UP*, No. 29/1938, 9–16 July, p. 178.

[45] *PAI UP*, No. 18/1938, 23–30 April, p. 114.

[46] *PAI UP*, No. 24/1939, 3–10 June, p. 146.

[47] Letter from Om Prakash (who was apparently a member of the Bareilly DCC) to K.K. Sinha, 22 April 1938. *M.N. Roy Papers*, Roll 9, Correspondence with LRC, UP-1.

down the hostility of the peasants who did not respond favourably to the idea of keeping the Kisan Sabha organization separate from that of the Congress.[48] However, by 1939, it was clear that the DCC was controlled by the Congress Socialists: Hakim Brijlal Varman was the president of the DCC and Ramji Das Gupta, another CSP leader was one of the secretaries.[49]

In Meerut, the Congress Socialists had close links with the *Kirti Lehar* newspaper, which was an organ of the Punjab-based Kirti Communist group.[50] Separate committees had been formed in this district for work amongst peasants, labourers and students.[51] The peasant wing of the party took up the cause of sugar cane growers, who were agitating against the sugar mill authorities' refusal to buy cane from them.[52]

Etawah Congress Socialists launched their political activity with a well-attended Kisan conference in Jaswantnagar in March 1938.[53] The local Congress leaders, however, refused to attend this conference. In this district, as in Agra, relations between the orthodox Congress workers and Socialists remained strained throughout the period under consideration.[54]

In Moradabad, the CSP was constituted on the eve of the Lahore Conference of the party,[55] that is, in March–April 1938. In early 1938, the unit claimed to have been active on the labour front, having organized three strikes in the course of 1938–39: among railway coolies, electroplating workers and *thelawalas*.[56] Tours of the district by Kisan Sabha leaders such as Jogesh Chatterji, Mohanlal Gautam and Swami Sahajanand, and Socialists such as Sajjad

[48] *PAI UP*, No. 9/1938, 17–26 February, p. 58.

[49] Approved Members of the Mathura CSP, from UP CSP list for 1939, *JP Papers*, CSP File No. 35, p. 58.

[50] The Office of the *Kirti Lehar* was a much favoured venue for CSP meetings, see *PAI UP*, No. 28/1938, 2–9 July, p. 171.

[51] These committees were set up in August 1938. *PAI UP*, No. 32/1938, 30 July–6 August, p. 197.

[52] *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937, 13–20 February, p. 188 and 8/1938, 12–19 February, p. 55.

[53] The week-long conference was attended by 4,000 Kisans. *PAI UP*, No. 14/1938, 26 March–2 April, p. 89.

[54] *PAI UP*, No. 29/1938, 2–9 July, p. 171.

[55] Letter from Girish Mathur, Joint Secretary, Moradabad CSP to Jayaprakash Narayan, 10 August 1939, *JP Papers*, CSP File 35, pp. 11–12.

[56] *Ibid*.

Zaheer, Acharya Narendra Dev and Damodar Swarup Seth as well as Youth League leader Pandit Parmanand were organized by the Socialists.[57] Indeed, one observer remarked that in Moradabad, "almost all the active Congressmen who are at all serious about work, have joined the CSP".[58] Kisan rallies in support of the UP Tenancy Bill were held by CSP leaders who spared no efforts to counteract the propaganda of the zamindars.[59] By 1939, the CSP list for Moradabad contained 31 names: a rather impressive figure when compared to those of Agra (13), Mathura (10) and equalling those of Bareilly (31) and Aligarh (34).[60] Yet, control of the DCCs or even the TCCs seems to have eluded this energetic group.[61]

In Muzaffarnagar too, the existence of a CSP unit has been recorded. In a letter to Jayaprakash Narayan in April 1939, the general secretary of this body claimed to have unionized sweepers and *tongawalas*.[62]

Another major area of Congress Socialist activity besides the Meerut division was the Saharanpur–Dehradun–Kumaun belt. This was a favourite site for summer study-camps.[63] There was a group of active Socialists here who organized Kisan conferences[64] and May-Day celebrations,[65] championed the cause of sugar cane growers,[66] and unionized *tonga* drivers and sweepers.[67]

[57] *PAI UP*, No. 46/1938, 5–12 November, p. 293.

[58] Letter from one J.S. Aggarwal to M.N. Roy, 22 August 1938, *M.N. Roy Papers*, Roll 9, Correspondence with LRC, UP 2.

[59] *Ibid*.

[60] *JP Papers*, CSP File 35, p. 6.

[61] The fact that the Socialists had to resort to disruptive tactics at DCC meetings such as shouting of slogans and creation of general pandemonium is indicative of the frustration that must have prevailed. *PAI UP*, No. 35/1938, 20–27 August, p. 212.

[62] Letter dated 5 April 1939, *JP Papers*, CSP File 35, p. 14.

[63] For instance a Socialist camp was held near Almora from 15–31 May 1937. *PAI UP*, No. 23/1937, 5–12 June, p. 412.

[64] A District Socialist and Kisan Conference, attended by 5,000 people was held in Saharanpur on 18 and 19 June, *PAI UP*, No. 26/1938, 18–25 June, p. 158.

[65] See *PAI UP*, No. 19/1938, 17 May, p. 118 for May Day celebrations in Saharanpur.

[66] This was in Dehradun District, *PAI UP*, No. 10/1937, for week ending 6 March, pp. 217–18.

[67] Tonga drivers of Saharanpur protested against an unfavourable decision taken by the SDM. *PAI UP*, No. 38/1937, 18–25 September, p. 595. For the

Though a substantial number of Congress Socialists were to be found in the Congress ranks in eastern UP, it is difficult to identify their specific spheres of activity. This is due to the virtual absence of industrial units in this belt; Benares and Allahabad and, to some extent, Gorakhpur being the only exceptions.[68] As for work amongst the peasants, Congressmen of all shades and hues were involved, since the Congress in eastern UP had acquired a peasant character even earlier. Yet, it must be noted that the Socialists had achieved considerable success in penetrating the Congress organization in this region. In Ghazipur, Rajbanshi Lal, secretary of the DCC in 1939, was a Socialist, so also was the secretary of the Basti DCC, Harivan Singh. Azamgarh and Mirzapur had one Socialist DCC member each in 1939.[69] Ballia, according to Sajjad Zaheer, was also a CSP stronghold.[70]

In central UP, the districts of Lucknow and Kanpur were prominent on the Socialist map with the largest concentration of Congress Socialists in the province.[71] The Kanpur branch had a strong Communist lobby which, from early 1937, had been locked in a grim battle with the Socialists to wrest the Mazdoor Sabha

Socialist involvement see *PAI UP*, No. 15/1937, 10–17 April, p. 297. *Ibid*., for Saharanpur Sweepers' agitation.

[68] There was a sizable amount of socialist activity in the cities of Benares and Allahabad. The press workers of Allahabad received help from Sajjad Zaheer and Z.A. Ahmed. *PAI UP*, No. 40/1937, 2–9 October, p. 595. They also assisted the Steel Trunk Workers' Union of Allahabad, *PAI UP*, No. 15/1937, week ending 1 May, p. 314. In Benares, Sheopujan Tripathi organized iron foundry workers and water works labourers and railway coolies. *PAI UP*, Nos. 6 and 7/1938, week ending February 25, p. 49. As with the Kisans, Tripathi tended to adopt an ultra-militant attitude here as well. For instance, the striking iron foundry workers were urged to reject Congress attempts at a compromise and to continue with their strike in February, 1938. *Ibid*. In Gorakhpur, a Press Workers' Union was set up with the help of local Congress Socialists in February 1938, *ibid*.

[69] UP CSP List, *JP Papers*, CSP File 35. In Mirzapur the Socialists had organized May Day in 1938. *PAI UP*, No. 19/1938, 1–7 May, p. 118.

[70] Sajjad Zaheer, *OHT*, p. 94.

[71] The Lucknow unit had a strength of 57 in 1939 whereas the Kanpur unit had 63 members. The CSP Allahabad by comparison had only 38 members. UP CSP List, *JP Papers*, CSP File 35. (However, it may be noted that the Lucknow list also included Unnao members.)

from the latter's hands.[72] Both believed in general strike as the "goal" of the labour movement but the Communist element tended to press the point much further than the Socialists. In this way they succeeded (at least temporarily) in projecting themselves as the greater champions of the workers' cause.[73]

In Lucknow, the CSP had a large component of erstwhile revolutionary terrorists who had now turned to Kisan and labour work with gusto.[74]

Besides these two focal points, there were pockets of Socialist mobilization in Bahraich (where *ekka* and *tongawalas* were organized) and in Kheri.[75]

A circular issued by the general secretary of the party in July 1935 had spelt out the areas of intended Socialist activity. Though they were advised to focus on three sections of society: labour, the peasantry and students, work amongst the peasantry was identified as being the most important.[76] The term "peasantry" included not merely the tenants but smaller landlords as well.[77] It was

[72] The Communists believed that it was important for labour to go on strike even on petty issues like the slapping of a worker. The Congress Socialists on the other hand felt that workers should strike only when advised to do so by the Mazdoor Sabha. These two differing points of view were frequently expressed at the same meeting. See, for example, meeting of Cooper Allen workers on 3 January 1937, *PAI UP*, No. 1/1937, 2–9 January, pp. 64–65.

In the first week of the Congress ministry's term of office, matters reached a near-crisis. The Communists wanted to give a call for a general strike while the Mazdoor Sabha, after talks with the Premier, wanted to call off the existing strike. When the Communists refused to listen, the executive committee of the Mazdoor Sabha passed a resolution condemning the attitude of the Communists. *PAI UP*, No. 29/1937, 17–24 July, p. 528.

[73] *Home Poll*, 18 September 1938, report for the first half of September.

[74] Ram Krishna Khattri, Jogesh Chandra Chatterji and Parmanand were the most important names in the Lucknow CSP List for 1939, *JP Papers* CSP File 35, p. 7. Ram Krishna Khattri along with others helped to form a union in the Upper India Couper Paper Mills in March 1937. *PAI UP*, No. 13/1937, 11–18 March, p. 272. In June 1938 he presided over a meeting of Lucknow scavengers. *PAI UP*, No. 25/1938, 11–18 June, p. 155.

[75] *PAI UP*, No. 28/1938, 2–9 July, p. 171.

[76] *AICC*/G-23/1934–35, p. 33.

[77] "The Kisans and the smaller zamindars should band together and form organisations". Acharya Narendra Dev, "Kisan Sabha in Uttar Pradesh", *Congress Socialist*, 28 November 1936.

explained that the forming of peasant unions alone would not be adequate; it was essential "to create issues" around which agitations could be organized.

The UPCSP could not have been satisfied with its record of work amongst the peasantry. They were seldom able to go beyond the towns and reach out directly to the peasants. It was only in places like Fatehpur or Jhansi, or where charismatic Kisan leaders existed, that the CSP was successful in building a strong peasant movement. On the other hand, regions such as Unnao and Gorakhpur, which had an impressive record of Kisan mobilization during the tenure of the ministry, managed largely with local efforts.[78]

Yet, the UP Kisan Sabha was a Congress Socialist organization. Indeed, in early 1937 it was remarked that the Kisan Sabha's was the only "fruitful work" being carried out by the UPCSP.[79] But, as will be seen in the following chapter, the UP Kisan Sabha's role was limited to knitting together diverse district-level peasant groups into some kind of a united body, rather than deepening the Kisan movement in each district. In the former task they were fairly successful until March 1939. Once the Forward Bloc was formed, however, even these efforts at integration failed with several district-level Kisan organizations freely joining the Forward Bloc.

The extent of the CSP's influence over labour remains to be assessed. Those sections of industrial labour which had been unionized even prior to the formation of the CSP (for example, the Kanpur textile workers and railway employees of Lucknow, Jhansi and Gorakhpur), chose to adopt the Communists rather than Congress Socialists as their mentors and leaders in the period of this study. In the relatively unorganized sector, the Socialists had better success; they were able to organize sweepers, railway porters, coolies, *ekka, tonga* and *thelawalas* in various parts of the province.[80] The CSP also mobilized the workers in small-scale units and cottage industries such as *biri* makers, glass bangle workers,

[78] See chapter on Kisan Sabha.

[79] Report sent by UPCSP workers to Jayaprakash Narayan, 1 July 1937, *JP Papers*, CSP File 19, pp. 1–2.

[80] In Benares an Ekka and Tonga Union was in existence by June 1937. *PAI UP*, No. 23/1937, 5–12 June, p. 422. For details on CSP work with Benares and Allahabad coolies, see footnote 68. For Saharanpur see footnotes 64–67.

press-workers and shop assistants.[81] Amongst larger industrial concerns, Socialist influence extended to paper mills and sugar factories, in places where workers' movements were yet to attain the maturity of the Kanpur textile labour.[82]

In the CSP self-perception, this influence must have been woefully inadequate. For, their original aim was to "concentrate on such fields of labour organisation as may be of political advantage". Thus, "railways, mines and heavy industries" were identified as the areas of primary concern.[83]

How did the Socialists go about their task of organizing labour? In every case, the first step seems to have been the formation of a union. Thereafter, a strike for better living and working conditions would be organized. A strike could serve several purposes. Through a strike the Socialists hoped (*a*) to build up the revolutionary consciousness of the working class; (*b*) to paralyze the government and thereby weaken the infrastructure of imperialism in India; and (*c*) to improve the workers' lot. However, only occasionally would a conscious effort be made to include the anti-imperialist message in the workers' propaganda.

[81] The Firozabad glass bangle workers were persuaded to go on strike by the local Mazdoor Sabha in August 1939. *PAI UP,* No. 34/1939, 12–19 August, p. 222. The management declared a lockout which continued until October. *PAI UP*, No. 41/1939, 1–7 October, p. 266. *Biri* workers in Allahabad were mobilized by Sajjad Zaheer and K.M. Ashraf. *PAI UP*, No. 17/1937, 3–10 April, p. 282.

[82] The workers of Lucknow Paper Mills, for instance, were organized in April 1937 by Shiv Sharma, Shiv Gopal and Ram Bharose who collected Rs 200 from the workers to form a union. *PAI UP*, No. 14/1937, 3–10 April, p. 282. However, in July 1938, during elections to the Lucknow Paper Mill Workers' Union, Sri Narain Tiwari, a Communist, heavily defeated Narendra Dev, *PAI UP*, No. 32/1938, 30 July–6 August, p. 197.

In Agra, sugar factory workers were pressurized by the Socialists to go on strike in May 1937. *PAI UP*, No. 17/1937, week ending 1 May, p. 314.

For details on the Kheri sugar factory labourers see *PAI UP*, No. 41/1938, 1–8 October, p. 262.

The Gorakhpur sugar mill workers were helped by Sheo Nath Pathak, Biswanath Mukharji and Ram Bahal Tewari, a strike leader from Assam. *PAI UP*, No. 34/1938, 12–19 August, p. 222.

[83] CSP General Secretary's Circular of 5 July 1935. *AICC*/G-23/1934–35, p. 33.

In a few cases, the strikes succeeded in obtaining some immediate economic gains.[84] More often, however, strikes continued indefinitely, doing more harm than good to the workers' cause.[85] Nor were the unions, formed by the Socialists, destined to survive for long. A Congress Labour Sub-Committee report for the UP in 1939 revealed that many of the unions formed over the preceding two years had ceased to exist or were in the process of disintegration.[86] They had buckled under the mill owners' pressure, which had increased in direct proportion to the growth of workers' militancy. When workers found that their employers' hostility increased, the immediate tendency was to dissociate themselves from the union.[87] This trend was very pronounced in small-scale enterprises where, to this day, 90 per cent of the workers remain ununionized. With rampant unemployment and scarce job opportunities, it was too risky to go on strike.

One cannot help wondering whether the Socialists would have had better luck if they had concentrated their energies on constructive and welfare work, postponing strikes to a later date. On the other hand ultra-radical postures did earn the Communists a substantial labour following by 1938. The latter had a longer record of labour activity and their greater experience and wider network enabled them to attract many members. Not only did labour unions pass into the hands of Communist leaders[88] but even some young Socialist labour organizers joined the CPI, attracted by the latter's programmes and policies.[89] Indeed, the CSP labour programme proved, in practice, to be a watered-down version of that of the Communists. Besides, deliberate takeover bids by Communists and Royists resulted in splits within Socialist-inspired unions.[90]

Despite the official Socialist policy of not giving direct leadership to the student movement, the Congress Socialists showed

[84] As in Agra, where better wages were obtained for municipal sweepers in April 1937. See footnote 35.

[85] As with the Firozabad glass bangle workers. See footnote 81.

[86] *AICC*/20/1940, pp. 172–78.

[87] This happened with some labour unions in Hathras, Aligarh. *Ibid*.

[88] For example, in the Lucknow Paper Mill Union in 1938.

[89] A.P. Tiwari, a Lucknow-based trade union worker since the 1930s had this to say of his personal experience. Interview dated 22 April 1986, Lucknow.

[90] Ajim Malik, a Royist wrote gleefully to K.K. Sinha on 28 November 1938. "After a prolonged fight against the united front of CP and CSP we

great eagerness to work amongst students. In early 1937, Acharya Narendra Dev and Mohanlal Gautam in Lucknow and its neighbourhood, Balkrishna Sharma in Kanpur, Sajjad Zaheer, Z.A. Ahmed, K.M. Ashraf, Hajra Begum (all Communists) and Rammanohar Lohia in Allahabad, Sheopujan Tripathi and Harsh Deo Malaviya (Communist) in Benares, all frequently addressed student gatherings, supported students' strikes, gave them political education and initiated debates on political issues.[91]

But, as has been shown earlier, the students were less inspired by their Socialist mentors once the ex-revolutionary terrorists were released from jails in August 1937. Nor were Socialist leaders keen on sustained work among students. Save for the young Allahabad foursome, K.M. Ashraf, Rammanohar Lohia, Hajra Begum and Z.A. Ahmed, who would still occasionally preside over or address student conferences, no CSP leader maintained links with students.[92] Other Left leaders, such as M.N. Roy, displayed an occasional interest in students.[93]

By 1939, the student movement had passed entirely into the hands of the ex-revolutionary terrorists (who too were members of the CSP vide a decision taken on 27 April 1938).[94] At the Benares Divisional Youth Conference held in Jaunpur on 6 and 7 May 1939,

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have captured the transport workers union." *M.N. Roy Papers*, Roll 10, Letter No. 17.

[91] *PAI UP*, No. 1/1937, 26 December–1 January, p. 32; No. 8/1937, 13–20 February, p. 189; No. 9/1937, 20–27 February, p. 201; No. 13/1937, for week ending 3 April, p. 272; and No. 30/1937, 24–31 July, p. 540.

[92] In Benares, Sajjad Zaheer and Sampurnanand were invited to the Russian Revolution Week celebrations. *PAI UP*, No. 46/1937, 19–20 November, p. 634; S.S. Batliwala and Sajjad Zaheer gave lectures in the course of "Students Week" in Allahabad in October 1938. *PAI UP*, No. 49/1938, 22–29 October, p. 284. A few months earlier, in August 1938, the students conference in Ballia District was organized by Biswanath Prasad Mardana, a local Communist. *PAI UP*, No. 34/1938, 13–20 August, p. 210.

[93] M.N. Roy addressed a student gathering at Allahabad University in December 1938. *PAI UP*, No. 1/1939, for week ending 31 December, p. 5. A few days later, in early January, he addressed a student gathering in Dehradun, *PAI UP*, No. 2/1939, 31 December–7 January, p. 10.

[94] At a meeting of ex-revolutionary terrorists at S.N. Sanyal's house in Lucknow on 27 April 1938 the decision to join the CSP was taken and a discussion with Acharya Narendra Dev was to be held to clarify ideological positions. *The Leader*, 1 May 1938.

the main speakers were Rajdeo Singh, Pandit Parmanand, Batukeshwar Datt, Yashpal, Manmath Nath Gupta and Bhupendra Nath Sanyal—all one-time revolutionary terrorists with the exception of Rajdeo Singh.[95] A week later, at the Makoor Conference of the UP Provincial Youth League in Unnao, the proceedings were dominated by the same groups.[96]

Relations with the Congress and the Communists

By this time the AICSP's relations with the larger Congress organization had undergone several changes. A vague sense of uneasiness and misgiving about the Congress leadership had persisted until the Haripura Congress session. There was a feeling that the UP and Bihar ministries were dragging their feet over the release of political prisoners.[97] But even the Socialists were unprepared for the dramatic resignation by the two ministries in February 1938. A feeling of remorse entered the minds of the Socialist: were they responsible for having "forced the issue" of political prisoners to this awkward moment?[98] Quite clearly, the Socialists thought that the opportune moment for a confrontation with the British Government had not arrived as yet. This remorse must account for the changed attitude of the UPCSP in the aftermath of Haripura. At an informal conference of the UPCSP in April 1938, the ministries were congratulated for various positive actions. Around this time, Sampurnanand, a Congress Socialist, joined the Cabinet as Education Minister, thereby according the legislative activity of the Congress some validity.

The unanimous approval by the Congress of Subhas Bose's candidature for Presidentship in early 1938 allayed CSP fears about

[95] *PAI UP*, No. 19/1939, 29 April–6 May, p. 107.

[96] *PAI UP*, No. 21/1939, 13–20 May, p. 122.

[97] See articles to this effect in *Sangharsh* (a UP Kisan Sabha-CSP newspaper) between 24 January and 21 February 1938. Haig remarked to Linlithgow on 22 January 1938 that "the Left wing...are becoming so dissatisfied with Pant's comparatively moderate policy that they are seriously contemplating trying to get rid of him". *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

[98] J.P.'s article "Lessons of Haripura", *Congress Socialist*, 26 February, 1938, pp. 145–55.

Gandhian leadership. Though no Socialist joined the new Working Committee of the Congress, the CSP felt that its interests were adequately protected by the presence of Subhas Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru on the Committee.[99]

Soon after Haripura came the Lahore session of the CSP where the "Communist conspiracy" against the party was "exposed" by M.R. Masani. There was also an attempt by the Communists to capture control of the CSP National Executive at this session.[100] The party was thus embroiled in internal matters. At a meeting of the UPCSP at Lucknow in the same month a proposal "to allow members of the CPI to enlist in the CSP" was defeated.[101] Acharya Narendra Dev, in an article in *Congress Socialist*, 9 April 1938, maintained: "The Communists must not raise, in and out of season, the demand for their inclusion in our party. No man can be loyal to two parties at the same time."[102] Yet, Communists were already present in the UPCSP in substantial numbers—some held important positions as well.[103] In the following months, a half-hearted attempt was made to identify those members of the party who were not genuine Congress Socialists,[104] and to restrict their numbers. It is not known whether any disciplinary action was taken against them. The CSP's final break with the Communists at the national level occurred after the Ramgarh session in 1940.[105]

In the second half of 1938, the Socialists in the UP practically suspended all other forms of activity to concentrate on anti-

[99] *Congress Socialist*, 30 April 1938.

[100] Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, Bombay 1960, p. 166.

[101] See *PAI UP*, No. 15/1938, 2–9 April, p. 97. Sajjad Zaheer, in his interview, (*OHT, NMML*) also refers to a provincial conference of the UPCSP in Lucknow at which he had presented the draft thesis, later placed at the Lahore session. According to him Acharya Narendra Dev attacked the thesis "furiously" and regarded it as a "sort of attempt of the Communists to take over the party".

[102] Chandroday Dikshit, ed., *Democratic Socialism in India*, New Delhi, 1971. Readings from the writings of Acharya Narendra Dev, p. 21.

[103] Sajjad Zaheer, secretary of the UPCSP, for instance.

[104] The secretary of the UPCSP prepared a list of "approved members" of the party, district by district, in early 1939. A separate list of those who belonged to the CPI was submitted to the National Executive for scrutiny, *JP Papers*, CSP File 35, pp. 1–9.

[105] See R.P. Dutt, *India Today*, (Calcutta, second Indian edition, 1970), pp. 431–32.

recruitment and anti-Federation propaganda. Non-participation in a European war had been one of the mainsprings of Socialist policy from the very beginning and in September–October 1938, in the wake of the Munich crisis, there was the distinct possibility of the outbreak of war. In this context an Army Recruitment Bill was placed before the Central Legislative Assembly. Socialists, through speeches and protest demonstrations against visits of recruiting officers, registered their opposition to the Bill.[106] Almost at the same time, the Viceroy was seriously considering the introduction of the Federal Clause in the 1935 Act.[107] While all sections of the Congress opposed this move, the Socialists expressed their disapproval more strongly.[108]

In the concluding months of 1938, the Socialists found themselves once again vaguely uneasy about the Gandhian section of the Congress. Gandhi's sharp reaction to the Socialist walkout at the Delhi AICC session in September 1938 in protest against the civil liberties resolution is well-known.[109] The UP Socialists wondered whether the roots of democracy in the Congress were being weakened. To add to their apprehensions, the introduction

[106] *PAI UP*, No. 39/1938, 17–24 September, p. 245; No. 41/1938, 1–8 October, p. 260; and No. 49/1938, for week ending 3 December, p. 313.

[107] See *Linlithgow Speeches and Statements 1936–43*, New Delhi, 1945, p. 132, for his speech at a dinner hosted at the Bengal Club on 5 January 1938; speech at the meeting of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, Calcutta, 19 December 1938, pp. 151–56, for references to the introduction of a federation.

[108] In Kanpur, effigies of the Federation Scheme were burnt by the Socialists. *PAI UP*, No. 49/1938, 26 November–3 December, p. 314. See also, V. Menon, "The Indian National Congress and Mass Mobilisation", *Studies in History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1980, pp. 130–31.

[109] At the AICC meeting a strongly worded resolution on the civil liberties issue had been passed. It stated that "Congressmen have been found in the name of Civil Liberty to advocate murder, arson, looting and class war by violent means". The public was warned though the Congress policy on civil liberties remained unchanged, "Congress will, consistently with its tradition, support measures that may be undertaken by the Congress Governments for the defence of life and property." Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, p. 92. The Socialists saw this as an attack on their ideology and walked out of the meeting. Criticising this action, Gandhi commented: "The walk-out at the last *AICC* meeting of the opponents of the Civil Liberties Resolution was an unfortunate and hasty act...the protest was against the majority refusing to accept amendments which cut at the root of the resolution...." *Harijan*, 15 October 1938, *CWMG*, Vol. 67, p. 401.

of the UP Tenancy Bill in the Legislative Assembly had been delayed because the Congress Parliamentary Sub-Committee wanted to give the landlords a sympathetic hearing. The Socialists were aghast. How could the High Command intervene on behalf of the landlords after the Pant Ministry had flatly refused to consider their objection? The UPCC passed a strongly-worded resolution denouncing this move.[110] Distrust of the Congress leadership was reflected in the speeches made by the Socialists in the Agra countryside at which Kisans were asked to "capture" the Congress Party.[111] But the CSP leadership in the UP was restrained. Acharya Narendra Dev, for instance, made no reference to the Delhi AICC meeting or the problems with the Tenancy Bill in his speeches at this time.

However, when the issue of Subhas Bose's re-election for a second term as President came up, the CSP leadership too became vocal. Bose was regarded as their own candidate. He had been invited to inaugurate several Socialist functions in the province.[112] Acharya Narendra Dev openly campaigned for Bose, stressing the importance of having a young and dynamic leader at the helm of affairs at this critical juncture.[113] The note of urgency in the Acharya's speeches betrayed his silent fears about the Gandhian lobby.

In the UP, the Socialists had done remarkably well at the delegates' election for the Tripuri Congress.[114] They were satisfied with their performance in the UPCC election as well.[115] Acharya Narendra Dev was expected to become President of the UPCC but ultimately the honour was bestowed on Jawaharlal Nehru.[116] Things were never so good for the CSP in the province—but, unfortunately, these days were numbered.

[110] *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938–39, pp. 73–75.

[111] *PAI UP*, No. 42/1938, 8–15 October, p. 264.

[112] For instance, he was called to inaugurate a CSP school of politics near Barabanki in December 1938. *The National Herald*, 18 November 1938, p. 4.

[113] *Sangharsh*, 29 January 1939.

[114] The majority of the UP delegates were Congress Socialists. *Sangharsh*, 26 January 1939, p. 16.

[115] *Sangharsh*, 5 December 1939, pp. 10–11.

[116] *Ibid*.

The UP had given Bose an impressive mandate: 269 delegates having voted in his favour and 185 for Pattabhi Sitaramayya.[117] But when, at the Tripuri Congress session, G.B. Pant proposed a resolution affirming faith in Gandhi's leadership, and requesting the President to nominate a Working Committee in accordance with Gandhi's wishes, the CSP was unwilling to oppose it.[118] They remained neutral—a decision which caused problems within the party and outside it. Some members of the UPCSP resigned in protest against the party's stand, thereby causing a rank and file revolt.[119] There was even talk of forming a rival CSP.[120] Other Left forces condemned the Socialists as betrayers of the cause; they alleged that the Pant resolution had been passed due to the abstention of the Socialists.

In the ensuing days, some members of the UPCSP calmed down and withdrew their resignations.[121] But others joined the Forward Bloc despite the official CSP strictures against joining the Bloc.[122] As already mentioned, branches of the Forward Bloc had been formed in several CSP strongholds: Allahabad, Lucknow, Moradabad, Bareilly, Mathura, Etawah and Meerut. (In Agra, the Forward Bloc encountered some resistance.[123])

The CSP did nothing to counter the Forward Bloc propaganda. This would have been contrary to their politics. Hence they could only watch helplessly as many of their rank and file joined the Bloc and were lost to the party. (This included Damodar Swarup Seth, who became Secretary of the UP unit of the Forward Bloc.)

The crisis prompted the CSP leadership to make a reassessment of its stand at Tripuri. It was concluded that to act without

117 *Sangharsh*, 5 February 1939, p. 3.

118 The CSP felt that opposition to the Pant resolution would mean an advocacy of "alternate leadership". From an unsigned note dated 17 March 1939 (probably prepared by Jayaprakash Narayan), *JP Papers*, CSP File 10, p. 40.

119 *Sangharsh*, 9 April 1939, p. 12. See also an unsigned note, written perhaps by Jayaprakash Narayan on 17 March 1939 about the CSP stand at Tripuri, *JP Papers*, CSP File 10.

120 *Ibid*. In the UP, those who had resigned included Damodar Swarup Seth and Jogesh Chatterji.

121 For instance, Damodar Swarup Seth and Jogesh Chatterji, *Sangharsh*, 9 April 1939, p. 12.

122 *Sangharsh*, 29 May 1939, p. 10.

123 In Agra, Dr Raghubar Dayal campaigned, with little success for the Forward Bloc. *PAI UP*, No. 37/1939, 2–9 September, p. 239.

the support of the other Left groups, that is, the Royists and the Subhashites, had been wrong. The CSP, by being the only Left group to have abstained on the Pant resolution, had broken the unity of the Left. (The Communists had supported the Pant resolution—but this was not commented upon in the CSP document.) The CSP leadership also felt that a schism had appeared between the party's rank and file and its leadership, which had caused the two to pull in different directions. Hence, it was necessary to remove the gap by "democratizing" the party and by "proletarianizing" it.[124]

This was the perception of the leadership. The historian can find other reasons for the crisis in the party. The CSP's loosely structured character was not conducive to organizational discipline,[125] and only strict discipline would have enabled the party to act in a unified manner after Tripuri. If we closely examine the speeches made by Socialists in the province during the previous three years, we can easily detect the lack of a coherent policy. Socialists held a wide variety of views on issues such as unity within the Congress, attitudes towards the ministry, relationship with the Kisan Sabhas, etc. For instance, the official policy on the Congress ministry seems to have been not to openly criticize it[126] and to even have the Socialist-dominated UPCC adopt a resolution to that effect.[127] But the Communist section of the party had no scruples about acting to the contrary, especially in Kanpur.[128] Other elements were no better: in July 1938, Sheopujan Tripathi had accused the Congress government of being under the control of zamindars and mill owners.[129]

[124] Unsigned note about the CSP stand at Tripuri, 17 March 1939, *JP Papers*, CSP File 10.

[125] *JP Papers*. Though Acharya Narendra Dev maintained that "the CSP is a political party with a distinct ideology, programme of work, approach and discipline" and not a joint front as the Communists tried to make it, it remained the latter. *Congress Socialist*, 9 April 1938.

[126] See, for example, Algu Rai Shastri's speech in Azamgarh defending the Government's position. *PAI UP*, No. 42/1938, 8–15 October, p. 264. The Congress Socialist Party meeting in Benares in September 1938 appealed for the strengthening of the ministry's hands. *PAI UP*, No. 38/1938, 10–17 September, p. 241.

[127] As reported in *Sangharsh*, 24 October 1938, p. 16.

[128] Arjun Arora, at a Kisan Sabha meeting in Kanpur in October, 1938 spoke of "kicking the Ministry aside" if it did not remove the troubles of the Kisans. *PAI UP*, No. 42/1938, 8–15 October, p. 264.

[129] *PAI UP*, No. 29/1938, 9–16 July, p. 176.

As for unity within the Congress, while the leadership hoped to carry all sections of the Congress towards socialism, a CSP meeting in Lucknow advised the "labourers and Socialists" to "capture the Government" and to turn out Congress liberals.[130]

After the Tripuri Congress session, the CSP took to frequent shifts of position. When Subhas Bose handed in his resignation from the Presidentship of the Congress at the Calcutta AICC session of April–May 1939, the Socialists were highly critical of this act. They accused him of having precipitated a crisis in the organization.[131] (One wonders whether Bose could have done anything else in the given situation.) Conversely, the party expressed faith in Gandhi's leadership.[132]

The gap between Bose and the Socialists widened when the former announced the formation of the Forward Bloc.[133] The Socialists felt that there were enough avenues for radical activity already. Hence, members of the CSP were asked not to join the Bloc.[134] Editorials in *Sangharsh* in early June 1939 were replete with statements such as:

> The CSP leaders want to wage a peaceful struggle in cooperation with the Gandhians. They believed that the Gandhian leaders can be persuaded to prepare for a non-violent struggle.... Hence they do not believe in the policy of forming leagues and blocs.[135]

The culmination of this mood was the issuing of a joint statement by P. C. Joshi and Jayaprakash Narayan "on behalf of all left forces" that "Congress is not a parliament in which opposing parties try to remove each other; this is a front whose unity must never be broken. The consolidation of left forces that we desire within the Congress will never be achieved by creating a Forward Bloc."[136]

[130] *PAI UP*, No. 38/1938, 10–17 September, p. 237.

[131] *Sangharsh*, 7 May 1939, p. 3.

[132] "The CSP believes that Gandhian leadership will fight British imperialism", editorial in *Sangharsh*, 4 June 1939, p. 5.

[133] *Sangharsh*, 21 May 1939, p. 10. However, the CSP decided not to actively oppose the Bloc.

[134] *Sangharsh*, 28 May 1939, p. 10.

[135] *Sangharsh*, 11 June 1939, p. 9 (translated from Hindi).

[136] *Sangharsh*, 11 June 1939, p. 13 (translated from Hindi). It was around this time that an article titled "The Problem of Left Unity", probably written

However, the AICC meeting of 21–22 June 1939 at Bombay changed the mood entirely. The passing of two controversial resolutions revived earlier misgivings about the Gandhians. One disallowed *satyagrahas* by individuals or groups without the permission of the PCC. (This related to the numerous calls for *satyagraha* given by individual Congressmen at this time.)[137] The other resolution prevented the PCCs from interfering "with the discretion of the Ministry".[138] This was seen as a move to strengthen the hands of the ministries which were allegedly becoming more authoritarian and repressive in this period.[139] The two resolutions, coupled with the reluctance to act on the Tripuri war resolution, shook the Socialists and made them revise their opinion of the Gandhian leadership.[140] This incident serves to show the ambiguities in the CSP's relationship with the Congress (or at least the Gandhian section of it). Owing to the lack of a deep bond, the former's attitude towards the latter fluctuated phenomenally and was somewhat episodic in character.

The Bombay AICC meeting resulted in the adoption of two courses of action by the Socialists: (*a*) the CSP decided to join the Left Consolidation Committee of Forward Blocists, Royists, Communists and other left groups formed in June 1939;[141] (*b*) it decided to participate in the All-India Protest Day, which was held on 9 July against the Working Committee resolutions. However, these

by JP, was prepared. In it was stated "Leftism and rightism are certainly relatively terms and unfixed. Left and right opinion vary in proportion from issue to issue. If we take the Congress, we will find that on several issues the whole Congress is left.... It was due to these considerations that the Party always opposed the formation of a left party" and "Leftism cannot advance when the whole Congress retreats". *JP Papers*, CSP File 13.

[137] N.N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. 1, January–June, p. 357.

[138] Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, p. 115.

[139] The *Sangharsh* of 25 June 1939, p. 10 for instance, complained about the misuse of the ministry's powers to stop Hindu–Muslim conflict. The order, it wrote, also gave permission to take action under Sections 107 and 153 against workers of the labour movement, especially Communists.

[140] See editorials in *Sangharsh*, 2 and 9 July 1939, p. 9.

[141] In the formation of Bose's Left Consolidation Committee, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati in our understanding, played a major role. See latter's note to K.F. Nariman, 20 May 1939, *Indulal Yagnik Papers*, Subject File II, Part II, p. 309.

decisions were not welcomed by all Socialist leaders: a group consisting of Achyut Patwardhan, M.R. Masani, Rammanohar Lohia and Asoka Mehta handed in their resignations in protest against the party's change in policy and its veering away from the earlier commitment to take the whole Congress forward without splitting it into radical and revolutionary camps.[142]

On the eve of Protest Day, Nehru issued a statement to the press strongly criticizing the CSP's actions.[143] This threw the entire Socialist camp into disarray. Many were unwilling to defy Nehru but it was too late to issue clear directions to the rank and file who had made elaborate preparations for the day in their areas.[144] Consequently the Socialist role in the Protest Day proceedings was a highly confused one.[145] The day did not evoke much response in the UP save in some cities.[146]

This confusion also characterized the proceedings of the UPCC meeting of 5–7 August where the 9 July demonstrations were discussed. While the statement that all Congressmen should maintain the unity of the Congress, revealed the misgivings about participation, a feeble attempt at justification ("people should have the freedom to express their points of views") was also made.[147]

[142] *Sangharsh*, 9 July 1939, p. 14. Zareer Masani observes: "These leaders were by now frankly pro-Gandhian and had been writing openly about the radical potential of Gandhian ideology...." Masani, "Radical Nationalism in India", p. 287.

[143] About the proposal for the All-India Protest Day Nehru said: "At any time it would have been a dangerous proposition...to put it forward today, with the world hanging over the brink of a crisis, is to be guilty of the most amazing short-sightedness". "A Dangerous Proposal", 7 July 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 582.

[144] Z.A. Ahmed to Jawaharlal Nehru, 18 July 1939, *JN Papers*, Part I, Vol. 1, pp. 88–90.

[145] Note, for instance, Z.A. Ahmed's account of his impromptu speech at a Delhi Protest Day meeting: "I admitted that I personally did not like the two Resolutions of the *AICC*...but that if the agitation against these resolutions led to greater conflict within the Congress organisation...neither the Left nor the Right could gain anything thereby. I emphasized that the holding of public meetings of Congressmen as a protest against the decisions of the *AICC* was not right...." Letter to Nehru, 18 July 1939, *JN Papers*, Part I, Vol. 1, pp. 88–90.

[146] *PAI UP*, No. 29/1939, 8–15 July, p. 180. Kanpur was the only city where the meeting was attended by a 1000 people.

[147] *Sangharsh*, 13 August 1939, p. 12.

Perhaps to cover up for the clumsy performance on 9 July, UP Socialists returned to their watchdog activities vis-à-vis the ministry. Protests were made against the UP Government's treatment of labour and the arrests of Socialists in Kanpur, Unnao and Fyzabad.[148] Acharya Narendra Dev was critical of the "reformist" trend in the Congress and the tendency of Congress ministries to become mere law-and-order enforcement agencies.[149] Damodar Swarup Seth even suggested that the Congress should now relinquish offices.[150] This may be contrasted with the Socialists' feeling, in February 1938, that the time was not ripe for resignations. The Socialists were also greatly concerned about the alarming proportions that the communal problem was assuming. This was seen as a disastrous consequence of office-acceptance.[151] The ministry was also hauled up for its slackness in controlling riots.

At the grass roots level the Socialists were amazingly lethargic in July–August 1939. Practically no evidence of Kisan, student or labour activity is available. The disruption caused by the Forward Bloc was undoubtedly responsible for this state of affairs.

That the Socialists in the UP were still annoyed with the Gandhian leadership and more in tune with the Left Consolidation Committee is revealed by the joint statement of Mohanlal Gautam, Damodar Swarup Seth, Jogesh Chatterji and B.P. Sinha in August 1939. The statement rejected Mahatma Gandhi's attempt to "introduce *ahimsa*" and to take the Congress on the path of constitutionalism.[152] The absence of Acharya Narendra Dev's name from the list of signatories is significant as well as intriguing. Not to join an open campaign against the Gandhian leadership was characteristic of his political behaviour. (His championing of Bose's cause for the Presidentship was not contradictory: that was an election and he was only supporting one candidate against the other.) But it is difficult to figure out his stand on the joint statement. Was he willing to give tacit support to it, or was he critical? If he was critical, can we infer that Narendra Dev's influence in the UPCSP was on the wane?

[148] *Sangharsh*, 16 and 30 July 1939, p. 10 and p. 16 respectively.

[149] *Sangharsh*, 16 July 1939, p. 5.

[150] *Sangharsh*, 30 July 1939, p. 5.

[151] Acharya Narendra Dev's editorial on the communal problem, *Sangharsh*, 13 and 20 August, 1939, p. 9 and 10 respectively.

[152] *Sangharsh*, 20 August 1939, p. 3.

However one thing was certain. By August 1939 the UPCSP was singularly incapable of speaking in one collective voice.

The disciplinary action taken by the Congress Working Committee against Subhas Bose for his role in the 9 July demonstration, and the ban on his holding executive office in the Congress for three years, was described as "harsh" and "unjust" by the Socialists. Even Acharya Narendra Dev expressed his unhappiness over the verdict.[153]

After the outbreak of the war the Socialists were once again conciliatory towards the Congress leadership.[154] The Wardha Working Committee resolution on "India and the War" of 14 September 1939 was welcomed by the Socialists, who also called upon Jawaharlal Nehru to assume leadership of the country. Gandhi too was congratulated for "not being stubborn" about the resolution.[155]

Shortly after this, in October 1939, the CSP withdrew from the Left Consolidation Committee. Thereafter, a new phase of moving closer to the Gandhians began.

Conclusion

Throughout the post-Tripuri period and even earlier, the CSP, far from taking the Congress forward, was being tossed and buffeted by strong political gales. The party's frequent shifts of position and returns to earlier positions reflected its weakness, its inability to maintain a clear perspective and, worst of all, its vulnerability to external pressures. Rather than being able to adopt a clear-cut policy for itself, the party allowed stronger political currents to determine its positions. Even the Forward Bloc, an amorphous entity with no ideology to speak of, seemed stronger than the CSP during the June–August period.

Between 1937 and 1940 the party was almost continually involved in the process of discarding "extraneous elements". Royists were the first to leave of their own accord (from mid-1937 onwards), followed by the Subhashites (from June 1939), then the

[153] *Sangharsh*, 20 August 1939, p. 12.

[154] *Sangharsh*, 10 September 1939, p. 10. The Socialists were pleased at Subhas Bose being invited to the Wardha Working Committee meeting.

[155] *Sangharsh*, 24 September 1939, p. 9.

Sahajanand followers (January 1940), the ex-revolutionary terrorists (Ramgarh) and finally the Communists (May 1940).[156] The CSP was thus reduced to its essence, that is, those who believed in a socialist society, which would be created (*a*) indigenously, catering to the special needs of India and not by superimposing the Bolshevik model; (*b*) by acting within the framework of the existing nationalist movement; and (*c*) following the pattern of Social Democracy in Europe.

The clarity of Socialist thinking was best revealed during the war period when they were the only group, besides Gandhi himself, to maintain a consistent posture. While the Congress leadership wavered, sometimes sympathetic to Britain's plight and at other times antagonistic, and the Communists swerved abruptly from sabotage of the war effort to cooperation, the CSP firmly maintained that India had no role in this imperialist war except that of non-cooperation. Small wonder, then, that when the Quit India Movement came the Socialists were best prepared for it. Their unfailing conviction, ever since the war began, that *this* was India's opportunity to wrest freedom, carried them into the thick of the movement, enabling them to assume leadership and even determining its character.

[156] While the breaks with all other groups is too well known to need corroboration, the break with Sahajanand needs to be referenced. See JP's letter to Sahajanand, 10 January 1940, *Sahajanand Papers*, Roll 7.

FIVE

The Agrarian Angle: The UP Kisan Sangh

The Backdrop

The national movement in the UP had had a very strong agrarian base from a very early stage. The first Kisan Sabha in the province dated back to 1917 when the peasant leaders of Pratapgarh, Jhinguri Singh and Sahdev Singh, organized a Sabha at village Rure.[1] Shortly thereafter, many such Sabhas mushroomed in Pratapgarh district. (The popular Kisan leader Baba Ramchandra found that, prior to his appearance in Pratapgarh in 1919, "as many as twenty or twenty five sabhas" were already in existence.[2]) By 1920, the Rure Kisan Sabha was reported to be able to draw peasants from neighbouring Rae Bareli and Sultanpur districts by the thousands and had a membership of "about one lakh".[3] Soon, Kisan Sabhas emerged in neighbouring districts as well. Meanwhile, at Allahabad, a group of nationalists participating in the Home Rule movement had formed another UP Kisan Sabha (UPKS) under the leadership of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya

[1] Kapil Kumar, *Peasants in Revolt*, p. 71.

[2] Majid H. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces, 1918–22*, Delhi, 1978, p. 113.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

and Gauri Shankar Misra.[4] Purshottamdas Tandon was chosen President of this Sabha. While the former group of Kisan Sabhas was concerned with the specific problems faced by the peasantry in their region, the UPKS appears to have taken a wider view of the problem. One of the first efforts made by the UPKS was to get representation for the Kisans in the Montague-Chelmsford proposals.[5] The UPKS, which was popular in the Agra region as well, was said to have, by June 1919, 450 branch Sabhas in 173 *tahsils* of the UP.[6] In October 1920, on the eve of the Non-Cooperation Movement, a third organization, the Oudh Kisan Sabha (OKS), came into existence in Pratapgarh.[7] Its main work was to group together the scattered Kisan Sabhas in the Oudh region and to involve them in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Baba Ramchandra, Jhinguri Singh, Mata Badal Koeri of Rae Bareli, Kedar Nath of Fyzabad and Deo Narayan of Sultanpur were said to be the principal "local level peasant leaders" of the OKS, which also enjoyed the guidance and support of Jawaharlal Nehru.[8]

In the last 20 years, several studies of the peasant movement in the UP have appeared. Correspondingly there have emerged different viewpoints on the character of the Kisan movement and its relationship with the Congress. Here, we shall take only the important few. Majid H. Siddiqi refers to two trends: the "patronage of politics from above" and "Kisan Sabhas from below". He further goes on to state: "The movement from below responded to the politics from above and the initially sporadic nature of Kisan Sabha activity was given a direction by the developing trend of national political events."[9] D.N. Dhanagare, on the other hand, maintains that the Congress-led Sabhas tried to divert the then-powerful peasant movement into more reformist channels by blurring its anti-landlord and anti-moneylender focus.[10] The "damage" was less extensive, according to him, in 1920–21 than in the 1930–32 period. By the latter date, Dhanagare contends, the movement had

[4] *Ibid*., pp. 119–22. Kapil Kumar also states that the two organizations did not know of each other's existence until 1920.

[5] Majid H. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India*, p. 119.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 122.

[7] *Ibid*., pp. 143–44.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 146.

[9] *Ibid*., p. xi.

[10] D.N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India, 1920–50*, Delhi, 1983, p. 119.

become wholly dependent on the "reformist" Congress leadership. Hence, when the leaders were arrested, there was no alternative leadership available and the no-rent campaign died a natural death.[11] In Gyanendra Pandey's work, we find a description of a few Kisan Sanghs of the 1930s: the Achal Gram Sewa Sangh of Agra and Sitla Sahai's Kisan Sangh in Rae Bareli, for instance. These organizations preached amity between the zamindars and Kisans.[12] Pandey feels that, in the districts of Agra and Rae Bareli, which he studied, the Gandhi–Irwin truce dampened the Kisan movement, which was never able to recover the enthusiasm of the 1930–31 period. He also blames the Congress leadership, both at the provincial and district level, for taking disciplinary action against "militants" like Kalka Prasad who were advocating a no-rent campaign, rather than "giving a concerted call for organized peasant resistance."[13] Pandey, however, seems to overlook the strength of feeling in the province, even at the UPCC level, for a no-rent campaign, from mid-1931 onwards.[14] In November 1931 the Allahabad DCC was allowed to proceed with its no-rent campaign. In the following month the UPCC sanctioned the extension of the campaign to Kanpur, Etawah, Rae Bareli and Unnao districts.[15] In the eyes of the landlords of most of the affected districts, the difficulties encountered in collection of rent were due to the Congress influence.[16] On 20 December 1931 the British India Association declared that the Congress was starting "class war". They smelt "communism" in the air.[17]

As for the less violent and therefore less "spontaneous" character of the 1930–32 movement, we would only wish to submit that the worth of a movement must not be judged solely by the degree of violence permitted or employed. Its lasting impact—in this case,

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 123.

[12] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, pp. 41 and 175.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 182–83.

[14] Resolution of the UPCC Council, 18 July 1931, cited in *Agrarian Distress in the UP*, p. 248. See also S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal: A Biography*, Vol. 1, pp. 158–68.

[15] P.D. Reeves, *Landlords and Governments in Uttar Pradesh*, Bombay, 1991, p. 179.

[16] *Agrarian Distress in the UP*, Allahabad, 1931, Reprint, Delhi, 1982, p. 82.

[17] P.D. Reeves, *Landlords and Governments in Uttar Pradesh*, p. 179.

the ability to change the balance of forces between the landlords and the peasants in the latter's favour—is a better yardstick. All this is not to overlook the relatively poor guidance given by the Congress to the peasants during the agrarian crisis of the 1930s, which seems apparent from all accounts.

Kapil Kumar views the growth of the peasant movement in the UP from the early 1920s into the late 1930s as a process of linear development and sharpening of focus.[18] According to him, from a movement which saw few contradictions between the landlord and the peasant in the 1920s, the Kisan Sabhas of the late 1930s grew to enunciate clearly the conflict of interests between the zamindars/*taluqdars* on the one hand and tenants and agricultural labour on the other. From 1936 onwards, Kisan Sabhas strongly raised the slogan of abolition of zamindari—a demand which the peasants could not have thought of raising in the 1920s. But Kumar too sees the Congress as obstructing the growth of the Kisan movement. He agrees with Dhanagare's view that the Congress was extremely keen to blur the contradictions between classes in rural society—contradictions which were being increasingly brought to the fore by the Kisan movement.

All this literature helps us to approach the Kisan movement in the UP during the ministry period with a sufficiently critical framework. We have already dwelt adequately on the Congress ministry's agrarian programme and the links between the CSP and Kisan Sabha activity. But how did the Kisan Sabha movement in the UP function during the 1937–39 period?

The backdrop of the Kisan movement in the UP in the 1930s is the extensive ferment during the course of the Civil Disobedience Movement. Practically all parts of the UP were drawn into the no-rent campaign. Though repression had brought the movement to an end, this wave of Kisan militancy had a lasting impact on nationalist politics in the province. It was as if the leaders were keen to get back to the work that had been left unfinished when they were arrested in late 1931–32. As noted earlier, practically every Congress leader here had a history of involvement with the peasants. This involvement increased in the ministry years and in the new political context of 1937–39, Kisans were able to voice

[18] "Congress-Peasant Relationship in the late 1930s" in Panigrahi, ed., *Economy, Society and Politics in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1985, p. 234.

their grievances with greater confidence and conviction. It has been noted by Shri Krishan in an article on the peasant movement in south Gujarat and the Konkan region, that the so-called "peaceful" periods in the national movement were conducive to Kisan mobilization.[19] At such times the peasants were able to use the "open channels of protest" available to them.[20]

In the UP at the outset of the ministry period, the perception was that separate Kisan Sabhas must exist. The report of the mass contacts committee, constituted at the Faizpur session of the Congress in December 1936, had stressed the need to form "peasant associations", that is, bodies wholly consisting of peasants, to help a "harassed, oppressed, demoralized peasantry" to take "its just place in the national movement."[21] It was stressed that Congress Committees could not be expected to do the work of these peasant associations, since the former included all classes, many of which were more advanced than the peasants. The mass contacts committee of the UPCC also stressed the need for separate Kisan Sabhas, which alone could see to the "day-to-day demands" of the peasants.[22] The Committee pointed to the paucity of Kisan Sabhas in the province at that moment which, it explained, may have been due to the fact that hitherto local Congress committees "have often functioned as Kisan Sabhas".[23] But it was felt that this was not enough and, for reasons mentioned earlier, "Kisan Sabhas should be started with the goodwill of the Congress and with its co-operation."[24]

To a large extent, the work of setting up Kisan Sabhas was taken up by the Congress Socialists. They used political conferences held by the Congress to organize unions of peasants.[25]

In July 1937, the All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) at its Gaya session appointed a UP Kisan Committee consisting of Acharya Narendra

[19] "Peasant mobilisation, political organisations and modes of interaction: The Bombay countryside 1934–1941", *IESHR*, 32, 4, 1995, p. 429.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 429 and 437.

[21] *AICC*/G-30(A)/1937, pp. 75–77.

[22] UP Memorandum on Mass contacts (undated), *JP Papers*, Indian National Congress File 116, p. 106.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *UP General Administration Report, 1934–35*, pp. v–vi.

Dev, Mohanlal Gautam, Sajjad Zaheer and H.D. Malaviya with Dr K.M. Ashraf as the convenor.[26] The Committee at first tried to function on its own, but with little success.[27] It then decided to join hands with the UP Kisan Sangh (UPKS) (which had been revived in April 1935) since the unity of the peasant movement was proclaimed to be "the prime thing", and to jointly hold a Provincial Kisan Conference at Pilibhit in December 1937. The amalgamated UPKS remained a separate body until December 1938, when it was formally made a unit of the AIKS. Until then the UPKS was more a branch of the UPCSP.

The Kisan movement in the UP tried to establish a congenial relationship with the Congress. It emphasized that "our comrades and friends should try to work in harmony and co-operation with the Indian National Congress."[28] A questionnaire circulated by the UPKC to Kisan workers of all districts contained the following queries:

> Are you yourself a Congress member or not? If a member, please inform what position you occupy in the district, town, mandal and ward committees of the Congress. If not a member, please tell us is it incidental or deliberate?[29]

Unfortunately we do not have a record of the replies received. Meanwhile, a lot of local level Kisan Sabha work had already taken place. In the pre-election period, Kisan Sabhas had been formed only in such districts as had a previous record of peasant activity. In the post-election period, a great deal of spadework was done on virgin terrain. This was largely owing to the efforts of the new CSP, which controlled a fair number of lower level Congress committees. Thus, the job of setting up or reviving District, *Tahsil* and Mandal Congress Committees was accompanied by the formation

[26] UP Kisan Committee Circular No. 1, 27 July 1937, File 121 D. *JP Papers*.

[27] The Committee tried to systematize the work of the existing Kisan Sabhas in the province by sending out periodic circulars and asking district-level Kisan Sabhas to file weekly reports of their activities. However, no District Kisan Sabha complied and the matter was soon dropped. The Committee, despite its rather ambitious programme, ran out of steam very soon. *Ibid*.

[28] UPKC Circular No. 1, File 121D *JP Papers.*

[29] UPKC Circular No. 2, *Ibid.*

of Kisan Sabhas/Sanghs as well.[30] However, the efforts were not coordinated at the provincial level at this stage.

In any district, the first step towards the formation of a Kisan Sabha was the holding of a Kisan meeting, (usually in the context of a political conference) to which leaders from outside the district would be invited. Sajjad Zaheer and Damodar Swarup Seth were popular invitees, but occasionally Mohanlal Saksena and even G.B. Pant would be invited. Jhansi in the south-western part of the province and Kheri on the extreme north hosted two of the earliest meetings of this kind.[31] It is indeed noteworthy that most Kisan Conferences held in the period prior to the formation of the ministry combined anti-imperialist slogans with their class-based demands. During the actual ministry phase, however, anti-imperialism tended to give way to anti-ministry rhetoric.

Take, for instance one of the better organized Kisan Conferences held at Baghpat, Meerut in March 1937. (Police reports put the attendance at 3,000 whereas at the two meetings mentioned above, that is, in Jhansi and Kheri, the size of audiences had not exceeded 300.) This Conference was attended by important Kisan leaders like Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Indulal Yagnik, Jayaprakash Narayan, and even N.G. Ranga. One of the resolutions passed called for the "immediate suspension of all payment of land revenue and debts pending further legislation."[32] Other resolutions included a demand for the release of political prisoners and a declaration not to participate in any future war, presumably imperialist.

Through the months of March, April and May, there was a definite widening of the base of the Kisan movement. Sitapur, Pratapgarh, Agra, Hamirpur and Ghazipur all reported Kisan Sangh activities.[33] Apart from meetings, which still drew small audiences, another form of activity was the organizing of processions. On 18 April, a thousand Kisans were reported to have marched from Pratapgarh to Swaraj Bhawan in Allahabad to place

[30] *PAI UP*, No. 8/1937, 13–20 February, p. 185 for Pratapgarh, No. 9/1937, 20–27 February, p. 197 for Pilibhit, No. 10/1937, 27 February–6 March, p. 213 for Etah, Etawah, Gorakhpur, Jaunpur, Jhansi and Kheri.

[31] *PAI UP*, No. 12/1937, 20–27 March, pp. 237–39.

[32] *PAI UP*, No. 12/1937, p. 239.

[33] *PAI UP*, Nos. 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19/1937 for the periods 27 March–3 April, 3–10 April, 10–17 April, 25 April–1 May, 1–8 May and 8–15 May respectively.

before the AICC complaints of high-handedness by zamindars and *taluqdars*. Among the leaders of the procession were old-timers, Baba Ramchandra and Jhinguri Singh.[34] At Agra, on 27 and 28 April, the Kisan Sangh organized a procession and carried placards and flags around the village where a meeting was to be held.[35] Meanwhile, Congressmen K.D. Malaviya and Gopinath Srivastava were reported to be planning a Kisan march to the Council Chamber on the day that the Assembly began its session.[36]

Agra was the first district to establish an organizational infrastructure for the Kisan Sabha. In April 1937, Parvati Devi was chosen as President and Reoti Saran Sharma as Secretary of the District Kisan Sabha which planned to establish branches throughout the district.[37] Here non-Socialists, but Congressmen with a past history of Kisan mobilization, were said to be organizing the Kisan Sabha.

By July 1937, Kisan Sabha meetings were being held through the length and breadth of the province: from Aligarh, Agra and Etawah in western UP[38] to the eastern extremities, Azamgarh, Ballia and Gorakhpur.[39] While processions to local authorities continued to be organized,[40] there were reports from Meerut of Chamars spiritedly refusing to perform *begar* for a zamindar.[41] Unnao in the Oudh region stood out as a centre of pronounced Kisan activity. In fact the earliest references to a Kisan volunteer corps (akin to Congress Seva Dals) were from Unnao in late June 1937.[42]

The first day of the Congress in office was marked by a 2,500-strong Kisan march to the Council Chamber. Slogans such as "*taluqdari nash ho*" and "*inquilab zindabad*" were raised by the

[34] *PAI UP*, No. 15/1937, 10–17 April, p. 286.

[35] *PAI UP*, No. 17/1937, 25 April–1 May, p. 321.

[36] *Ibid*.

[37] *Ibid*.

[38] *PAI UP*, No. 29/1937, 17–24 July, pp. 530–31.

[39] *PAI UP*, No. 27/1937, 3–10 July, p. 510.

[40] This was from village Hathaunj, P.S. Bansdih, Ballia, from where on 11 July, Chittu Pande and Radha Mohan Singh took out a procession to the District Magistrate. *PAI UP*, No. 29/1937, p. 530.

[41] *Ibid*., p. 531.

[42] The corps was reported to have a membership of 450. *PAI UP*, No. 26/1937, 26 June–3 July, p. 490.

marchers, who were said to have largely come in from Rae Bareli.[43] Such marches were to be repeated on several occasions in the ensuing months,[44] notwithstanding the Pant ministry's lukewarm and then discouraging attitude towards them.

The AIKS had begun taking an anti-ministry stand from a rather early date. On the occasion of All-India Kisan Day on 1 September, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati sent in a message to the Kisan activists in the UP, expressing disappointment at the "failure" of all Congress ministries except the UP to implement the election manifesto.[45] At the AIKS meeting in the following month (that is, October 1937) at Calcutta, a resolution was passed, deeply deploring and expressing strong dissatisfaction "with the piecemeal, superficial and perfunctory manner in which the Congress ministries have dealt with only some of the problems affecting the Kisans."[46] These pronouncements strike us as having been rather premature, given the fact that the ministries had been in office for barely three months. The condemnations seem to have had less to do with the actual performance-level of the ministries and more with the Kisan Sabha conviction that the ministries must be relentlessly flogged to prevent them from sliding into reaction and pro-Imperialism.

Though the ministry in the UP had been singled out as the one ministry whose performance was passable, the general tone of the AIKS tended to get reflected in some speeches in the province. For instance, a Kisan pamphlet brought out by the Allahabad Socialists (in reality Communists) Sajjad Zaheer, K.M. Ashraf, H.D. Malaviya, Bhisham Arya and Z.A. Ahmed declared that the Congress ministry's "promises" to the peasants were "inadequate".[47] The Kisan leaders were critical of the Congress ministry on other counts too, such as the firing on Kanpur workers and the delay in the

[43] *PAI UP*, No. 30/1937, 24–31 July, p. 537.

[44] On 4 November 1937, 150 marchers of P.S. Kursi Barabanki had marched on foot to Lucknow and visited the Premier's residence as well as the Council Chamber to protest against a *ziladar*'s doings. *PAI UP*, No. 44/1937, for week ending 6 November, pp. 621–22.

[45] *PAI UP*, No. 33/1937, 14–21 August, p. 557.

[46] M.A. Rasul, *History of the All India Kisan Sabha*, Calcutta, 1974, p. 14.

[47] *PAI UP*, No. 33/1937, 14–21 August, p. 557. The pamphlet was titled "Kisanon ki Mang aur unki Larai".

release of political prisoners.[48] Such rhetoric could make the ministry somewhat defensive (though one wonders whether, in the first flush of legislative activity, the ministry even had time to notice these speeches.)

There was another new development. In the wake of the formation of a Congress ministry, Kisans, like other sections of society experienced a new elation, a new confidence. Almost always this new mood would be translated into acts of defiance against their landlords, which could sometimes take rather extreme forms. In September 1937 it was reported from Azamgarh that a large number of tenants, armed with *lathis*, had cut paddy belonging to a zamindar.[49] Meanwhile a European zamindar in Sultanpur was stabbed to death by two tenants as a fallout of a dispute over the land on which his bungalow stood.[50] In Allahabad, a woman zamindar was reported to have been beaten for attempting to collect rent.[51] In village Pakhanpura, in Ballia District, tenants managed to prevent labourers from cutting weeds on a zamindar's plot.[52] In Jalaun, tenants cut wood from the forest of a jagirdar.[53] Besides all this there was fairly generalized propaganda against the payment of rent to zamindars.[54]

The landlords were more than alarmed. Their reactions varied from a vague sense of uneasiness at the frequency of Kisan meetings to a generalized fear and expression of a need to form counter-organizations.[55] There were cases of retaliatory violence from zamindars in Azamgarh and Gorakhpur.[56] In Jhansi, zamindars were reportedly panic-stricken by rumours that the zamindari system would be abolished.[57]

[48] Sheopujan Tripathi, a Benares-based Socialist and Kisan Sabhaite commented that the Congress Ministries were becoming anglicized "and hence the police were able to fire on the Congress gathering at Kanpur." *PAI UP*, No. 34/1937, 21–28 August, p. 557.

[49] *PAI UP*, No. 37/1937, 11–18 September, p. 577.

[50] This incident took place on 30 August. *PAI UP*, No. 37/1937, pp. 578–79.

[51] *PAI UP*, No. 39/1937, for week ending 2 October, p. 589.

[52] *PAI UP*, No. 41/1937, 9–16 October, p. 600.

[53] *PAI UP*, No. 49/1937, 4–11 December, pp. 653–54.

[54] *Ibid*.

[55] For more details on this see P.D. Reeves, *Landlords and Government in Uttar Pradesh*, pp. 234–38.

[56] *PAI UP*, No. 49/1937, p. 654.

[57] *PAI UP*, No. 47/1937, pp. 20–27 December, p. 639.

There was a spontaneity to Kisan mobilization at this stage. Where formal organization existed, it was district-based. By the end of 1937, the chief district-level organizers of Kisan Sanghs/ Sabhas could be clearly identified. For instance in Shahjahanpur there was Prem Krishen Khanna, Munshi Singh in Pratapgarh, Ayodhya Prasad in Jhansi, Sahgir Ahmed in Etawah, Shibbanlal Saksena in Gorakhpur, Kalka Prasad in Rae Bareli, Ram Lakhan Tiwari and Vishwanath Mardana in Ballia, Harsh Deo Malaviya and Sajjad Zaheer in Allahabad, Prag Narain Srivastava in Farrukhabad, Hakim Brijlal Varman in Mathura, Rustamji Satin and others in Benares. Activists like Harsh Deo Malaviya and Sajjad Zaheer could often be found directing Kisan activities outside their own districts as well. What must be noted, however, is that not all the Kisan activity recorded above was at the initiative of the UPKS. Indeed the effort was uncoordinated, dispersed. An overarching unity was provided, if at all, not by the UPKS but by the context of the Congress in office.

The UP Kisan Committee (UPKC) and the earlier formed UPKS, it may be recalled, had resolved to work together to make the Provincial Kisan Conference a success.[58] The Conference was held at Pilibhit on 6–7 December. The proceedings were in a rather low key.[59] Police observers attributed the relative failure of this Conference to the inability of the more important leaders to attend, the pre-occupation of Kisans with watering the wheat crop, etc. In our reckoning, there were other contributory factors too—such as the choice of the venue. Pilibhit, unlike many other districts of the province, was a low Kisan mobilization region in 1937 (though it had witnessed some activity in February 1937). Had the Kisan leaders chosen Gorakhpur or Azamgarh, Jhansi, Etawah or even Sultanpur or Mathura, they would, in all likelihood, have had a better-attended Conference. The second reason has been already cited earlier: The UPKC/UPKS had failed to try and bring localized, dispersed pockets of Kisan activity together under its own umbrella. (Soon after this Conference, such an attempt was to be made, as will be seen later.) The resolutions passed at this

[58] UPKC Circular No. 3, 23 August 1937, *JP Papers*, File 121D, p. 39.

[59] The attendance was only 5,000 at the highest, which was the average attendance at any district-level Kisan meeting at this time. *PAI UP*, No. 49/ 1937, 4–11 December, pp. 654–55.

Conference were non-descript, yet worthy of notice because of their moderate tone,[60] and effort at including the largest possible cross-section of cultivators within the fold.[61]

Unsuccessful as the Pilibhit Kisan Conference might have been, the ensuing period saw the growth of organized Kisan Sabha work in the province. This was probably aided by a visit of Swami Sahajanand to the UP in early January 1938. Large crowds were reported to have turned up for his meetings at Unnao, Rae Bareli, Fyzabad and Barabanki.[62] By contrast, his meetings in western UP were not very well attended,[63] save for Shahjahanpur. The issue of Congress–Kisan Sabha relations was uppermost in Sahajanand's mind, because of the Bihar experience. Congressmen in Bihar had been asked not to take part in Kisan Sabha activities.[64] Sahajanand himself had just handed in his resignation from the Working Committee of the BPCC. There was an edge of bitterness to his speeches in the UP,[65] though he continually emphasized the need for Congress–Kisan Sabha unity.[66]

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati had, at some of his meetings, asked the Kisans to take a pledge to join the Kisan Sabhas. After his return to Bihar, the UPKS chalked out a set of programmes to consolidate the gains. Interestingly the attempt was to channelize all activity towards the ministry since there was a strong feeling that it was high time the Pant ministry enacted some agrarian legislation.

[60] Instead of any call for non-payment of rent, the Conference only asked for those tenants to be exempted from rent who were on the margin of poverty. *PAI UP*, No. 49/1937, 4–11 December, p. 655.

[61] The Conference also passed a resolution to the effect that land revenue should not be realized from petty zamindars. *Ibid*.

[62] *Sangharsh*, 10 January 1938, p. 12; *PAI UP*, No. 3/1938, 8–15 January, pp. 18–20.

[63] At Bijnor, which he visited on 12 January, his meetings drew an average of 300 persons; at Saharanpur 200 and at Meerut 150–300. *PAI UP*, No. 3/1938, 8–15 January, pp. 18–20.

[64] Babu Rajendra Prasad's Press statement, 18 December 1937, *Modern Review*, 1938, Vol. I.

[65] In some of his speeches, Sahajanand was reported to have said that when the British Government left India, the "selfish capitalist element" in the Congress must not be allowed to usurp Kisan rights. *PAI UP*, No. 3/1938, 8–15 January, pp. 18–20.

[66] *Ibid*.

Kisan Day was observed in some districts on 12 January 1938.[67] On 17 January, 200 Kisans from the districts of Lucknow and Rae Bareli marched to the Council Chamber to place their grievances before the ministry.[68] Meanwhile, the UPKS was planning a more elaborate march to the Council Chamber on 29 January, which would involve the peasants of all neighbouring districts. A list of 17 demands had been drawn up which the UPKS intended to subsequently place before the Haripura Congress. Virtually at the last minute, the march was put off, the UPKS having received an assurance from Jawaharlal Nehru that he would place their charter of demands before the Congress session at Haripura.[69] On 1 March 1938, when after the withdrawal of its resignation, the Congress ministry in the UP returned to office, the Kisans finally held the long-delayed march to the Council Chamber. About 20,000 Kisans were reported to have come into the city, about 90 per cent of them being from Unnao.[70] What were the demands put forward by these peasants? First and foremost was the demand that all categories of peasants, including those on *sir* land, be given hereditary rights. Reduction of rent and irrigation tax, the stopping of ejectments, the writing off of arrears of rent and previous debts, and the provision of government loans at low rates of interest, of free pastures for their cattle and of free hospitals, courts and schools for their children were the other immediate demands.[71] There were political slogans too—such as the demand for the removal of the ban on the Communist Party.[72] Bishambar Dayal Tripathi, the Unnao leader, was undoubtedly the moving spirit behind this march. (Tripathi, himself a Kisan-cum-Congress leader, had been initially opposed to the idea of forming separate Kisan Sabhas.)[73]

[67] We have evidence of the celebration of "Kisan Day" or "Kisan Demands Day", from Unnao, Lucknow, Allahabad, Kanpur, Fyzabad and Fatehpur. *PAI UP*, No. 3/1938, 8–15 January, p. 17, No. 4/1938, 15–22 January, p. 27. *Sangharsh*, 24 January 1938, p. 12.

[68] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1938, 15–22 January, p. 27.

[69] *PAI UP*, No. 5/1938, 22–29 January, p. 33.

[70] *PAI UP*, No. 10/1938, for week ending 5 March, p. 62.

[71] *Sangharsh*, 7 March 1938, p. 16.

[72] *Ibid*.

[73] On 8 January 1938, at a Unnao meeting held in connection with Sahajanand's tour, B.D. Tripathi, had apparently interrupted Jata Shankar Shukla, who was asking the audience to take a vow to join the Kisan Sabha,

The Kisan procession of 1 March was noteworthy for another reason—Kanpur labour and labour leaders also participated. A number of mill-workers carrying red flags had joined the marchers. In the evening, when the Kisans were assembled at Amin-ud-Daula Park for a meeting, they were addressed, among others, by Arjun Arora, the Kanpur-based labour leader. He assured the Kisans that 40,000 workers of Kanpur were behind them.[74] This link between the more advanced labour movement and the Kisan Sabha could have been a useful one, had it been pursued. Indeed, in a country like India, the link between labour and the peasantry was still unbroken. The average industrial worker of Kanpur, for instance, still had his moorings in a village—be it in distant Gorakhpur or adjoining Fatehpur. During prolonged strikes and at harvest time, he would return to his village. Agriculture still provided a supplementary source of income to his paltry earnings from the factory. If Kisan Sabha leaders had realized the immense possibilities latent in these linkages, they could have requisitioned the services of labour leaders and even ordinary workers for rural mobilization. This is not to say that Kisan leaders were unaware of this potential. In late November 1937, Ayodhya Prasad of Jhansi was reported to be holding "secret meetings with Kisan workers" to "amalgamate Kisan and labour agitation."[75] In March 1938, when feeling against the ministry was running somewhat high due to the arrest of some labour leaders for "inflammatory speeches",[76] Kisan-cum-Congress leader, Jata Shankar Shukla of Unnao, declared at a meeting that Kisans must organize outside the Congress, just as labour had.[77] Rather than ally with the Congress, Shukla said, Kisans could ally more profitably with labour. But there is no evidence of a follow-up in this direction. Instead, the onus seemed to be on labour leaders to promote the Kisan movement in their regions. In places like Jhansi, host to a number of important railway workers' conferences, labour leaders took interest in the peasant movement. In the case of Gorakhpur a strong peasant movement enabled the relatively

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and said that such vows could not be taken there. *PAI UP*, No. 3/1938, 8–15 January, p. 17.

[74] *PAI UP*, No. 10/1938, for week ending 5 March, p. 62.

[75] *PAI UP*, No. 46/1937, 13–20 November, p. 631.

[76] Asok Kumar Bose and Santosh Chandra Kapoor were arrested under Section 107 Cr. P.C.

[77] *PAI UP*, No. 13/1938, 19–26 March, p. 81.

weaker labour movement to find its feet. In the one instance where a major working class strike (in Kanpur, May–June 1938) coexisted with considerable agrarian ferment in the rural hinterland, it is difficult to determine whether the two were related, whether there indeed was an impact of the former on the latter.

The UPKS, owing to its heavy Socialist component, was more moderate than its Bihar counterpart. In January 1938, audiences at Kisan Sabha meetings were being told that they would have to pay up rent.[78] On the other hand the attitude of the Congress leadership in the UP was also more accommodative, at least until April 1938. Although there was a vague uneasiness about the Kisan Sabha's style of functioning and the bona fides of certain elements within it were suspect in the PCC's eyes, there also was a strong body of Congress opinion in the province (including Jawaharlal Nehru) which believed in the need for Congressmen to remain within Kisan Sabha units.[79] This was revealed when some individuals tried to get the PCC to pass a resolution, in December 1937, debarring members of its Executive Council from participating in Kisan Sabha activities.[80] The resolution was defeated and Kisan Sabhaites like Mohanlal Gautam and Damodar Swarup Seth continued to serve on the Executive Council of the UPCC. The attempt by some Congressmen in the UP like Gopinath Srivastava and Mohanlal Saksena to import Bihar PCC-like tactics to the UP was thus nipped in the bud.[81]

At the beginning of 1938 Mohanlal Saksena had made the allegation that Kisan Sabhas in the province had not done any constructive work.[82] The accusation was not wholly unjustified. Through 1937, especially after the formation of ministries, agitational politics had indeed been the hallmark of the Kisan Sabha's effort. With very little preparation, Kisans had been exhorted to

[78] *PAI UP*, No. 3/1938, p. 16.

[79] UPCC statement "On the Congress Attitude towards Kisan Sabhas", 23 May 1938, *SWJN*, Vol. 8, pp. 391–92.

[80] *Sangharsh*, 26 December 1937, p. 11.

[81] Gopinath Srivastava proposed the resolution alluded to earlier (*Sangharsh*, 26 December 1937, p. 11). Mohanlal Saksena, a strong candidate for the presidentship of the UPCC, was reported to have said in December 1937 that there was no need to have separate Kisan organization at all, since the Kisans were not a separate class. *Sangharsh*, 3 January 1938, p. 7.

[82] *Ibid*.

strike at their landlords, to refuse to pay rents, to snatch their lands, etc. By 1938, there was some change with attempts at regular, day-to-day meetings and ideological education.[83] Yet the approach was predominantly agitationist—an approach whose fundamental weakness lay in the propensity of the landlords to retaliate with counter-violence, combined with the helplessness of the State (that is, the Congress ministry) to protect the Kisans when they took to acts of aggression. Some Kisan Sabha leaders also adopted a rough, agitational approach towards hostile Congressmen[84] and a ministry slow to implement tenancy legislation.[85] Faith in the ministry would be lost the moment a Kisan leader was arrested. However, in the long run, wiser and older counsel prevailed and often the salve would be applied on bruised feelings by mouthing slogans about Congress–Kisan Sabha unity.[86]

In the second quarter of 1938, the UPKS began showing signs of maturing. The meeting of 2 April at Lucknow was intended to gather together all district representatives of the Kisan Sabha. Apparently some 16 district Kisan Sanghs had established contact with the UPKS; yet several others were working on their own.[87] A larger and better organized meeting was to be held in Kanpur on 12 and 13 June, to which two Kisan representatives from each

[83] In the summer of 1938, Kisan Sabhas planned political study camps in some places, for example, Lalitpur, Jhansi from 16–30 June 1938, where top Communist–Kisan Sabha leaders like Sajjad Zaheer, Rustamji Satin and Ayodhya Prasad would be present. *Sangharsh*, 9 May 1938, p. 16.

[84] In December 1937, Mohanlal Gautam reacted sharply to Gopinath Srivastava's statements and resolution in the UPCC. He accused Srivastava of trying to placate the zamindars and lamented that a reformist trend was growing within the Congress. *Sangharsh*, 26 December 1937, p. 11.

[85] From April to November 1938, when the ministry in the UP had to delay the introduction of the Tenancy Bill in the UP Legislative Assembly because (*a*) they needed to refer to the draft to a Select Committee of the Assembly and (*b*) the Congress Working Committee's Parliamentary Sub-Committee's efforts to work out an agreement with the two landlord associations on the Bill had led many Kisan Sabha leaders to proclaim that the ministry had sold itself to the zamindars, that the tenants could expect no justice from the ministry, etc.

[86] See, for instance, the Lucknow meeting of UPKS, 2 April 1938. *Sangharsh*, 11 April 1938, p. 16, *PAI UP*, No. 15/1938, 2–9 April, p. 97, where Kisan Sabha workers were urged to support and strengthen the Congress organization in spite of provocation from certain persons in the Congress.

[87] *Sangharsh*, 11 April 1938, p. 16.

district with a membership of over 5,000 would be invited. This was in addition to all the members of the provincial Kisan Sangh.[88] Some study camps, as in Lalitpur, Almora and Agra were planned for the summer.[89] The Unnao Kisan Sangh was especially active, holding regular meetings and forming *tahsil*-level branches.[90]

After the June meeting of the provincial Kisan Sangh, the President, Mohanlal Gautam, issued a further set of instructions to the branch organizations.[91] Local Kisan Sangh units were to undertake a membership enrolment drive (the fee being, of course, one anna), which was to be completed by 20 July. Following this the election machinery would be set in motion, with *Mandal* Kisan Sanghs holding their elections first, in August 1938. After this, elections to the District Kisan Sanghs were to be conducted. Finally, the provincial Sanghs elections were to be held in October 1938. Quite obviously the framework of the Congress organization was sought to be replicated. Even the enrolment drive seemed to be modeled on the Congress enrolment campaigns, conducted with so much aplomb in the 1936–39 period. Yet, the Kisan Sabha was never able to achieve the same degree of centralization as the Congress, great as its desire seems to have been to do so.

As a backdrop to all this, Kisan processions to local authorities continued with unfailing regularity. Indeed, by the summer of 1938 there was a marked increase in their frequency.[92] There was no dearth of Kisan Sabha meetings either. An added dimension to the Kisan movement appeared with the publication of the UP

[88] *Sangharsh*, 30 May 1938, p. 13.

[89] *Sangharsh*, 11 April 1938, p. 13 and 9 May 1938, p. 16.

[90] *PAI UP*, No. 15/1938, 2–9 April, p. 97.

[91] *Sangharsh*, 8 August 1938, p. 16.

[92] A single issue of *Sangharsh*, of 16 May 1938 reported three such processions: one in Etawah (2,000 strong, to the office of the District Magistrate) the second in Aligarh (100 to the office of the Collector) and the third to Ghazipur (8,000 to the office of the collector), pp. 15–16.

The Unnao Kisan Sangh took out demonstrations on 6 and 12 April, *PAI UP*, Nos. 15/1938, p. 97 and 16/1938, p. 103.

In Ghazipur the first act, after the formation of a District Kisan Sangh in May 1938, was the taking out of a procession of 2,000 Kisans to the District Magistrate court. *PAI UP*, No. 19/1938, 1–7 May, p. 118. In Hardoi, 100 Kisans of *tahsil* Shahabad marched to the District Magistrates residence in early June to complain against the zamindars. *PAI UP*, No. 23/1938, for week ending 4 June, p. 141.

Government's Tenancy Bill proposals in April 1938. Indeed, it was not just the draft Bill that activated the peasant movement, but its fallout in terms of landlord panic. In the following months, Kisan activists could no longer complain of general apathy. Peasants in all parts of the province were faced with the daily threat of eviction, refusal to be allowed to cultivate *sir* lands, and in the more backward areas, where landlord power was more absolute, physical assaults on tenants, Kisan leaders and even Congressmen became the norm. These reactions from landlord quarters came in the wake of a fear that, under the new Tenancy Bill, tenants, especially those on *sir* lands beyond the stipulated limit, would get hereditary rights.[93] Fear was also sparked off by the murder of a zamindar, Jangi Rai, in Maharajaganj, Gorakhpur, by his tenants in mid-May 1938, when he had gone to collect rent.[94] The murder shook up not only the zamindars; it had a chastening effect on the Kisan activists and leaders as well.

The Maharajganj incident may be treated as a watershed in the career of the UPKS. In the aftermath of the murder, there was a change in the tone of speeches at Kisan Sabha meetings. Speakers, by and large, no longer incited peasants to acts of defiance and aggression against the zamindars (as was done in the early months of the Congress ministry's tenure). Instead, peasants were, in the months of June–October 1938, being told to resist zamindari oppression firmly, either through passive resistance or by imposing a boycott on troublesome zamindars or by refusing to perform *begar*.[95] Chittu Pande of Ballia went to the extent of suggesting, at a Kisan conference, that if the zamindars forcibly ploughed their fields they should ask an old man of the family to lie down on the field and be killed, so that the authorities would have to convict the zamindar for murder.[96] This piece of advice may not have been acted upon by the Kisans but, by and large, peasants were favourably impressed with the above suggestions and tried to act in accordance with them. In Unnao (Police Circle Ajgain), in July 1938, a tenant was denied his rights of cultivation of a piece of land he had been tilling for a long time. His zamindar had got the land

[93] Chapter II of the Tenancy Act.

[94] *The Pioneer*, 11 May 1938, p. 1.

[95] See, for example, speech by Sheo Bhaddar Nath Tewari in Basti, *PAI UP*, No. 23/1938, for week ending 4 June, p. 139.

[96] *PAI UP*, No. 22/1938, 21–28 May, pp. 129–30.

ploughed and sown on his own. The tenant was undeterred. With the help of the Mandal Congress Committee, he managed to plough up and re-sow the field.[97] In Sultanpur, a *chamar* tenant refused to obey the zamindar's order to upturn a field already sown by the rightful tenants. He was beaten up by the zamindar's men, but he went to the local police station and filed a complaint under Section 452 IPC against the zamindar.[98] From Gorakhpur,[99] Basti,[100] Aligarh,[101] and Benares[102] there were reports of boycott of zamindars.

Judging from the behaviour of the big zamindars and *taluqdars* after the publication of the draft Tenancy Bill, it seems that they were most agitated about restrictions on *sir* in the proposed Bill.[103] This came as a shock to the landlords who had hitherto been used to accumulating unlimited amounts of *sir* land. Believing that they could somehow retain the lands if they acted swiftly, they tried to evict the tenants who had been cultivating them for several years. In the sowing season of 1938 (that is, the months of May–June) they tried to prevent tenants from entering the fields. Instead they tried to get such lands cultivated by their own servants, or low-caste peasants or other peasants who could not stake a claim to the land.[104]

Faced with this threat in virtually all parts of the province, the Kisans needed the help of an organization and leadership to resist the onslaught. This need was fulfilled in most areas. Consequently there emerged pockets of peasant *sangathan* (organization) in the UP during the second and third quarters of 1938. Fatehpur and Jhansi, Unnao, Rae Bareli and Basti, Benares and Gorakhpur were some such areas. As a result of varying factors, a stronger movement grew in some areas as opposed to others. Sometimes it was owing to a strong leadership (as in Fatehpur, Gorakhpur, Jhansi and Unnao) or an earlier tradition of peasant protest (as in Rae

[97] *PAI UP*, No. 29/1938, 16–23 July, p. 175.

[98] *Ibid*.

[99] *PAI UP*, No. 22/1938, pp. 129–30.

[100] *PAI UP*, No. 31/1938, 23–30 July, p. 187.

[101] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1938, 13–20 August, p. 205.

[102] *PAI UP*, No. 50/1938, 3–10 December, p. 317.

[103] It was originally proposed that a ceiling on *sir* lands be placed at 50 acres. This was later raised to 100 acres.

[104] *Sangharsh*, 11 July 1938, p. 17; 18 July 1938, pp. 16–17; 25 July 1938, p. 16; 8 August 1938, p. 22; 15 August 1938, pp. 16 and 22; 12 September 1938, p. 20.

Bareli, Fyzabad, Hardoi and Agra), or a sudden increase in zamindari oppression (as in virtually all parts of the province) and denial of long-standing rights (as in Fatehpur) or even a strong Communist-labour influence (as in Kanpur, Jhansi and parts of Gorakhpur).

A District-wise Analysis

To understand the nature of the peasant movement in the UP during the tenure of the ministry better, we have undertaken three case studies of Fatehpur, Jhansi and Unnao districts.

Fatehpur

Fatehpur district had, from early 1938 onwards, seen the build-up of a formidable Kisan movement. The Kisan Sabha unit held a series of Kisan meetings in all parts of the district from 3–10 March.[105] A steady tempo of activity was maintained thereafter, largely through the efforts of Swami Bhagwan, who was to emerge as an important peasant leader of the district. He was assisted by Swami Vidyanandji, Shivdatt and Rajendra Kumari.[106] Between March and June 1938 the Kisan Sabha seems to have done the initial spade work. On 3 June 1938 the Fatehpur District Kisan Sabha meeting reportedly attracted 10,000 Kisans. The meeting was addressed by leaders from outside the district too—B.P. Sinha, editor of *Sangharsh*, and the ex-revolutionary terrorist-turned Communist, Manmath Nath Gupta, were among the main speakers.[107] The meeting expressed sympathy with the striking textile workers of Kanpur.

There were several links between the industrial town of Kanpur and neighbouring Fatehpur. Indeed, the latter, as also Unnao, were Kanpur's rural hinterland. The two districts together provided a sizable portion of Kanpur's industrial labour force. Fatehpur also

[105] *Sangharsh*, 28 March 1938, p. 12. On 3 March, the Fatehpur *tahsil* Kisan Sammelan was held in village Makanpur. On 5–6 March there were Kisan meetings in Zafarganj Mandal. On 7–8 March it was at Ranipur village. On 8 March the Khaga *tahsil* Kisan Conference was held and on 9–10 March Kisan Sabhas were set up at Sawant and Kishnupur respectively.

[106] *Ibid*.

[107] *Sangharsh*, 13 June 1938, p. 16.

met the greater part of the foodgrain requirements of Kanpur city. The district was well connected with all parts of the province, since it was on the rail route with the East Indian Railway passing through the northern part of Fatehpur. The Grand Trunk Road also traversed the district from east to west.[108] Hence, it was easily accessible to major leaders touring the province. Yet Swami Sahajanand Saraswati thought it fit to visit Fatehpur only on his third tour, in October 1938. This was perhaps in recognition of the Kisan Sabha's successes in that region.

Fatehpur did not really have a past history of Kisan unrest, though it had participated in the no-rent campaign of 1930–31. *The Final Settlement Report*, drawn up in 1915 stated: "Relations between landlords and tenants are good, largely because the tenants are in so strong a position that landlords have little power of harassing them."[109] At that time, about 65 per cent of Fatehpur tenants had occupancy rights. Landlords were being progressively weakened, as elsewhere, by frequent sub-division of their holdings. It was also noted that land was passing from the hands of the Muslim zamindars (who had lost 31.63 per cent of their land) into the possession of the *Thakurs*.[110]

This region of relative landlord-tenant amity suddenly witnessed an upheaval in 1938. The publication of the draft Tenancy Bill's main provisions apparently caused an already insecure zamindari class to panic. There was large-scale denial of customary rights to tenants. One such right was the use of tank water for irrigation—the tanks being generally situated on zamindars' lands. In many parts of Fatehpur, the *kharif* crop of 1938 was affected by excessive monsoon showers, followed by a dry spell. When the tenants tried to draw water for their parched fields, they found that the zamindars had blocked their access to the tanks. As a result, it was reported, the *kharif* crop was practically ruined. In Khaga *tahsil* a zamindar by the name of Agha Ali Khan had gone to the extent of stopping the flow of water from a canal into the tank and turned the tank into a field. About 550 *bighas* of land were said to have been affected by this action.[111] The tenants of Khaga went to the

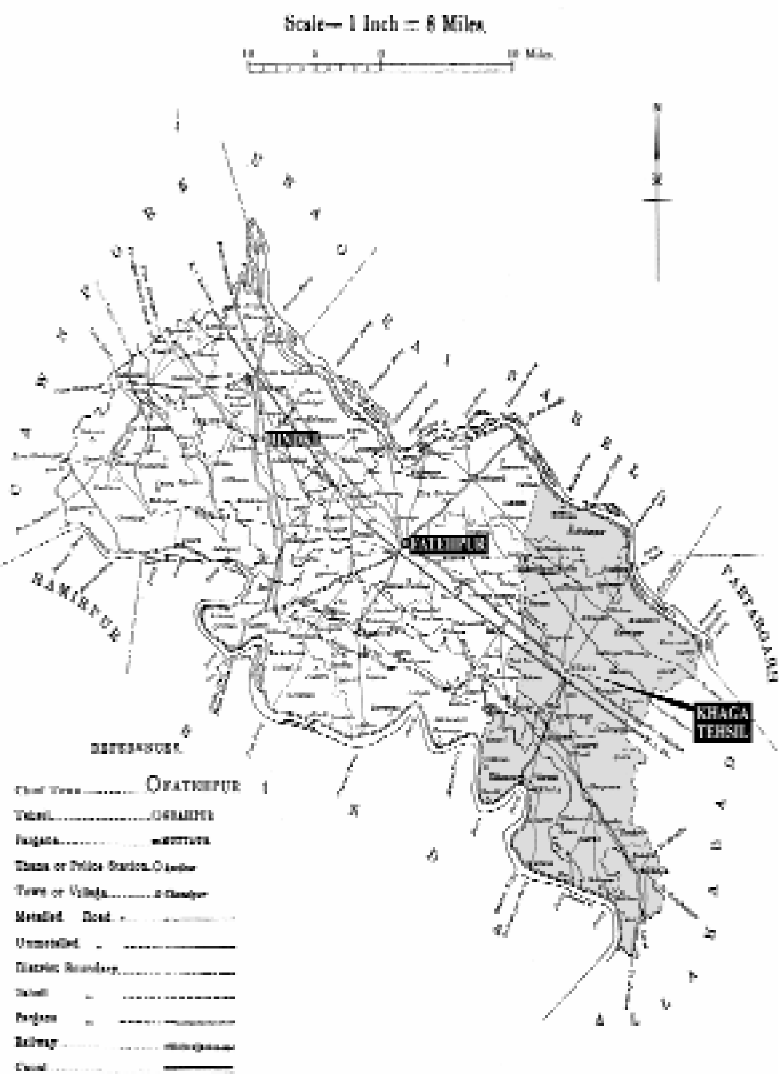
[108] C.L. Alexander, *Settlement Report for Fatehpur District*, Allahabad, 1915, p. 3.

[109] *Ibid*., p. 9.

[110] *Ibid*.

[111] *Sangharsh*, 1 August 1938, p. 16.

District Fatehpur



☐ Area of major kisan activity

Source: Fatehpur District Gazetteer by H.R. Nevill, ICS, Allahabad, 1906.

district authorities for help but apparently the police and even the legal apparatus were hand-in-glove with the zamindars.[112] The peasants had also made complaints in the local Kisan Sangh office as well as with the DCC. The latter appointed an enquiry committee which concluded that the zamindar was being unjust. The PCC was approached for permission to start *satyagraha* in the region, but this request was turned down.[113]

In spite of all these odds, or perhaps in response to them, the Kisan Sabha in Fatehpur gathered strength. But there was a slow moving away from the Congress. In mid-September, speakers at a Kisan Sabha meeting in Fatehpur advised the audience not to depend upon the Congress alone since the latter "had colluded with Zamindars and had done nothing substantial for the benefit of the tenants."[114] The urgency of the need to join the Kisan Sabha was thereby stressed.

Henceforth, relations between the local Congress unit and the Kisan Sabha were strained. This was unfortunate, given the fact that the two had had cordial relations in the beginning.[115] In this case the friction, which may have begun with the UPCC's stiff attitude towards the Kisan Sabha in mid-1938, was accentuated when negotiations with the zamindars over the Tenancy Bill were begun.

[112] *Sangharsh*, 8 August 1938, p. 22. In *tahsil* Khajua, village Khusmabad, a widow's property was snatched by a zamindar. The Court gave a verdict in the zamindar's favour and the government apparently supported the court's verdict. *Sangharsh*, 15 August 1938, p. 16.

[113] *Sangharsh*, 1 August 1938, p. 16.

[114] *PAI UP*, No. 38/1938, 10–17 September, p. 236.

[115] There had been no Congress opposition to the formation of a Kisan Sabha in Fatehpur, unlike Sultanpur, Meerut, Shahjahanpur, or even Rae Bareli. The second district Kisan Sammelan at Hathgam, Fatehpur, on 3 June 1938 was attended by Congressmen as well. *Sangharsh*, 30 May 1938, p. 16, 13 June 1938, p. 16.

In Sultanpur, Kisan leaders were reprimanded for not having got the permission of the PCC president before organizing the Sabha. *PAI UP*, No. 22/1937, 22–29 May, p. 389. In Meerut, the DCC President, Sheo Dayalu, rather quaintly accused the local Kisan Sabha of spreading "Communist propaganda" in the guise of the Congress. *PAI UP*, No. 25/1937, 19–26 June, p. 472.

In Shahjahanpur and Rae Bareli, Congressmen were vying with each other in a bid to attract larger audience for their respective meetings, which were to be held simultaneously. *PAI UP*, No. 46/1937, 13–20 November, p. 632, for Shahjahanpur and *PAI UP*, No. 24/1937 for week ending 19 June, pp. 43–44 for Rae Bareli.

Despite the Pant ministry's non-involvement in the negotiations, the Kisan Sabha, perhaps influenced by Swami Sahajanand's rhetoric, tended to blame it. This apparently alienated the local Congress organization, which, in November 1938, showed eagerness to dissociate itself from the Sabha's activities.[116] Since the reasons for the Congress–Kisan Sabha rift remain somewhat obscure in this instance, and only speculation is possible, one may also venture to suggest that the growing popularity of the Kisan Sabha had caused alarm in Congress circles. The Fatehpur Kisan Sabha was making rapid strides in early 1939. There were reports of Kisan meetings in every *tahsil* of Fatehpur on 13 February.[117] By mid-1939, the district had a Kisan volunteer corps. Formed with the intention of defending Kisans against zamindari atrocities, the corps had recruits from every village.[118] This corps was reported to be organizing daily marches to the villages, where meetings would be held. The meetings were usually addressed by Swami Bhagwan who, in one speech, advised the Kisans to give their landlords inferior grain in lieu of rent; at other meetings he exhorted his audiences to work for the destruction of capitalists and zamindars.[119]

To recapitulate then: Fatehpur, a district where tenants were relatively strong, seems to have thrown up an effective Kisan movement to meet the zamindars' challenge. The leaders of the Kisan Sabha were not prominent Congressmen, but they were not Congress malcontents either. It is difficult to quantify the effectiveness of the Kisan Sabha in defending tenants' interests vis-à-vis the zamindars. But the record of Kisan mobilization was indeed impressive. There was a growing sense of frustration with the ministry at least at two identifiable moments: one, in October–November 1938 when it seemed that the introduction of the Tenancy Bill into the Legislative Assembly was being inordinately delayed, and the second in April 1939, when there was a feeling that the UP government was trying to suppress the Kisan movement by arresting activists under Sections 107, 108 and 379 of the Indian Penal

[116] Police reports recorded that in mid-November Kisan Sabha workers and "orthodox Congressmen" held rival meetings at which audiences were advised to leave the opposite party. *PAI UP*, No. 47/1938, 12–19 November, p. 301.

[117] *Sangharsh*, 26 February 1939, p. 16.

[118] *PAI UP*, No. 23/1939, for week ending 3 June, p. 134.

[119] *Ibid*.

Code.[120] Could this have been avoided? Were not the interests of the Kisan Sabha and the ministry compatible to the extent that both were trying to secure tenant rights? To what extent was the sectarian attitude of Sahajanand and the AIKS contributory?

Unnao

Quite a different pattern of Congress–Kisan Sabha relations unfolded in Unnao. This district, though within the Oudh region, bore certain resemblances to Fatehpur (which was part of Allahabad division). Like Fatehpur, Unnao too provided a large number of industrial workers to Kanpur. Unnao, though a taluqdari area, did not have a strong proprietorial class. Indeed, *taluqdars* held only 21 per cent of the cultivated land. This was a "very low average for Oudh".[121] The remaining portion of the land was held under joint zamindari (25 per cent), single zamindari (17 per cent), *pattidari* (proprietary lease) and *bhaiyachara* (coparcenary estate) tenure (37 per cent). In 1921 it was observed that the general condition of proprietary communities was "one of struggling poverty, the almost inevitable results of constant multiplication of owners and subdivision of land".[122] Yet, tenurial rights were not very strong either. Only 0.83 per cent were occupancy tenants.[123] Zamindars extorted *begar, nazrana* and other illegal exactions from the tenants.[124]

Unnao was one of the most active areas in the agrarian movement of 1930–32. The villages of Pipri, Dandanapur and Sadasukh Khera in Purwa *tahsil* had shot into fame in 1931, for the violence unleashed by zamindars on tenants who had sent a petition to the District Commissioner, complaining against their landlord's excesses.[125] The Congress too was actively involved and pamphlets were circulated in 1930–31, outlining its efforts to get concessions

[120] *Sangharsh*, 24 April, 1939, p. 19.

[121] H.R. Nevill, *Unnao District Gazetteer*, 1923, p. 63.

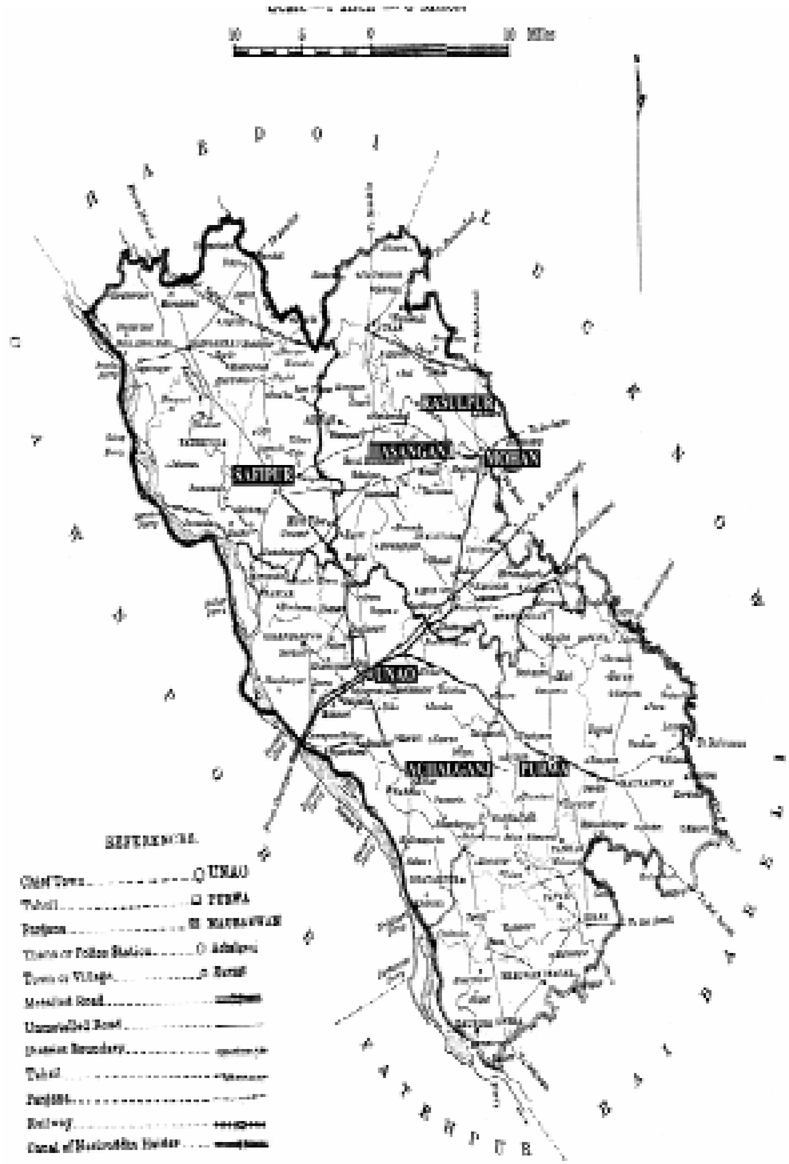
[122] *Ibid*., p. 64.

[123] *Ibid*., p. 83.

[124] For a detailed account, see Chapter 4, *Congress Agrarian Enquiry Committee Report, 1936*, "Illegal Exactions", p. 174.

[125] For details see *Agrarian Distress in the UP: Being the Report of the Committee Appointed by the Council of the UPPCC to Enquire into the Agrarian Situation in the Province*, Allahabad, 1931, pp. 170–81.

District Unnao



Source: Unnao District Gazetteer by H.R. Nevill, ICS, Lucknow, 1923.

for tenants, their futility and hence the need for withholding of rent, etc.[126] The peasants' response to this propaganda was sufficient for the police to term the situation "dangerous" in June–July 1931.[127]

Even before the formation of the Congress ministry, and prior to the establishment of a Kisan Sabha in the district, the existence of a Kisan Seva Sangh was reported.[128] Local Congressmen were the organizers. Plans were also afoot for a march to the Council Chamber.[129] Indeed Unnao, perhaps due to its proximity to Lucknow, frequently organized such marches in the ministry period. Kisan leaders like Pandit Ram Autar held meetings at which peasants were told not to pay rents directly to *taluqdars* but instead to deposit them in the *tahsil* office.[130] In January 1938 Swami Sahajanand Saraswati visited Unnao and was received by estimated 4,000-strong crowds at Hasanganj and Achalganj respectively.[131] Sahajanand's exhortation to the Kisans to form Kisan Sabhas rapidly was, however, not well received by the local Congress leader B.D. Tripathi. Tripathi was of the opinion that Congress could itself take up the problems of the peasants. Jata Shankar Shukla, the other prominent Congress leader of the district, was of the view that Kisan Sabhas were essential. Tripathi later changed his views and participated in Kisan Sabha work.

As in other parts of the UP, the landlords of Unnao too tried to evict their tenants in the summer of 1938.[132] The Congress and the Kisan Sabha proved their mettle by helping the tenants to resist these attempts. The movement was strongest in Hasanganj *tahsil*.[133] By late July 1938, the peasants were being advised to resort to *satyagraha* en masse when faced with attempts at eviction.[134] Kisan leaders apparently did not give much thought to the actual form that a *satyagraha* should take and whether it would be successful in a situation where the zamindars were hell-bent on denying

[126] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in UP*, pp. 97–98.
[127] *Ibid*., p. 192.
[128] *PAI UP*, No. 26/1937, 26 June–3 July, p. 490.
[129] *Ibid*.
[130] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1938, 15–22 January, p. 25.
[131] *PAI UP*, No. 3/1938, 8–15 January, pp. 18–20.
[132] *PAI UP*, No. 29/1938, 9–16 July, p. 169.
[133] *PAI UP*, No. 30/1938, 16–23 July, p. 181.
[134] *PAI UP*, No. 31/1938, 23–30 July, p. 188.

tenants their rights. It was reported that, at the end of July, the Unnao DCC had issued a leaflet calling for 50,000 volunteers to begin *satyagraha* if, within three weeks the landlords did not restore fields taken away from tenants.[135] This was followed by a series of meetings in early August.[136] By the third week of August, about 2,000 volunteers had been enrolled.[137] It may be noted that talk of *satyagraha* against landlords was not limited to Unnao—simultaneously, such talk was being reported from Mathura, Moradabad, Dehradun, Hardoi, Allahabad, Benares and many other districts as well.[138] However, in none of these places did plans materialize. Even in Unnao, the campaign seems to have fizzled out after some time.

The Kisans' cause in Unnao was facilitated by two factors—one was the strong leadership available and the other, the support and backing given by the state machinery. Ejected tenants, who took their cases to the district authorities, got justice after the authorities held special sittings to discuss the matter. By October 1938, zamindars had perforce to return lands to tenants. In some cases lands were returned even before the authorities' verdict was announced.[139]

Unnao's was thus a successful peasant movement during the tenure of the ministry. To this day, the struggle of 1938–39 is recalled with pride by Unnao leaders.[140]

What was the attitude of the Kisan leaders in Unnao to the larger Congress organization? As mentioned earlier, the peasant

[135] *PAI UP*, No. 33/1938, 6–13 August, p. 200.

[136] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1938, 13–20 August, p. 205.

[137] At the beginning of 1938 a "social boycott" of landlords in Hasanganj and Purwa *tahsils* was reportedly so complete that the landlords found it difficult to get even the services of barbers and washermen. Notification of Indian Press Service, 8 February 1938, *AICC*/24/1937, p. 19.

[138] Sheopujan Tripathi at Benares, *PAI UP*, No. 29/1938, 9–16 July, p. 176. For Moradabad, see *PAI UP*, No. 37/1938, 3–10 September, p. 229. For Hardoi, see Pandit Shanti Swarup's announcement, *PAI UP*, No. 31/1938, 23–30 July, p. 187.

[139] *Sangharsh*, 3 October 1938, p. 16. It may be mentioned here that in August 1938, the ministry had issued a circular to all district officers to take action against erring zamindars, under the preventive sections of the law. *PAI UP*, No. 34/1938, 13–20 August, p. 205.

[140] Such as Bal Gangadhar Tripathi, younger brother of B.D. Tripathi, for instance. Interview at Unnao, 29 April 1986.

movement was in the hands of important Congress leaders. Hence there was no conflict of interests between the local Congress and the Kisan movement. Indeed, the most important work of the DCC was the organization of the Kisans in these years. Speeches against the ministry were rare—only on one occasion, at a Lucknow Kisan meeting on 30 October, was an explicit anti-ministry speech, by Jata Shankar Shukla, recorded.[141] (B.D. Tripathi, in a series of speeches from May–August 1939 did emphasize that very little had been achieved by the Tenancy Bill.[142]) The fact that at Kisan meetings speakers took pains to explain the provisions of the Tenancy Bill indicated a certain faith in the ministry.[143]

However, in 1939, when the Gandhi–Bose rift took place, Unnao stated its clear preference for Bose. This district became an important centre for Forward Bloc activity in the UP, with B.D. Tripathi becoming the secretary of the All-India Forward Bloc. By June 1939, the Kisan movement in Unnao was also receiving the patronage of such well-known ex-revolutionary terrorists as Prakashwati Devi and Sri Narain Tewari. These leaders exhorted the peasants to wrest freedom "by any means" during the next war.[144] Village Rasulpur Baqi, where one such meeting was held, was the scene of a "riot" a month later. In this incident, which started as a zamindar–tenant dispute over a field, about 300–400 Congressmen reportedly surrounded a zamindar's party and assaulted them with lathis.[145]

Jhansi

From Unnao we shift to Jhansi, where *satyagraha* did not remain at the level of rhetoric but was translated into actual practice. As noted earlier, Jhansi had recorded a high level of peasant activity

[141] *PAI UP*, No. 45/1938, for week ending 5 November, p. 288. At this meeting Pandit B.D. Tripathi also deplored the attempts at a compromise with the zamindars over the Tenancy Bill.

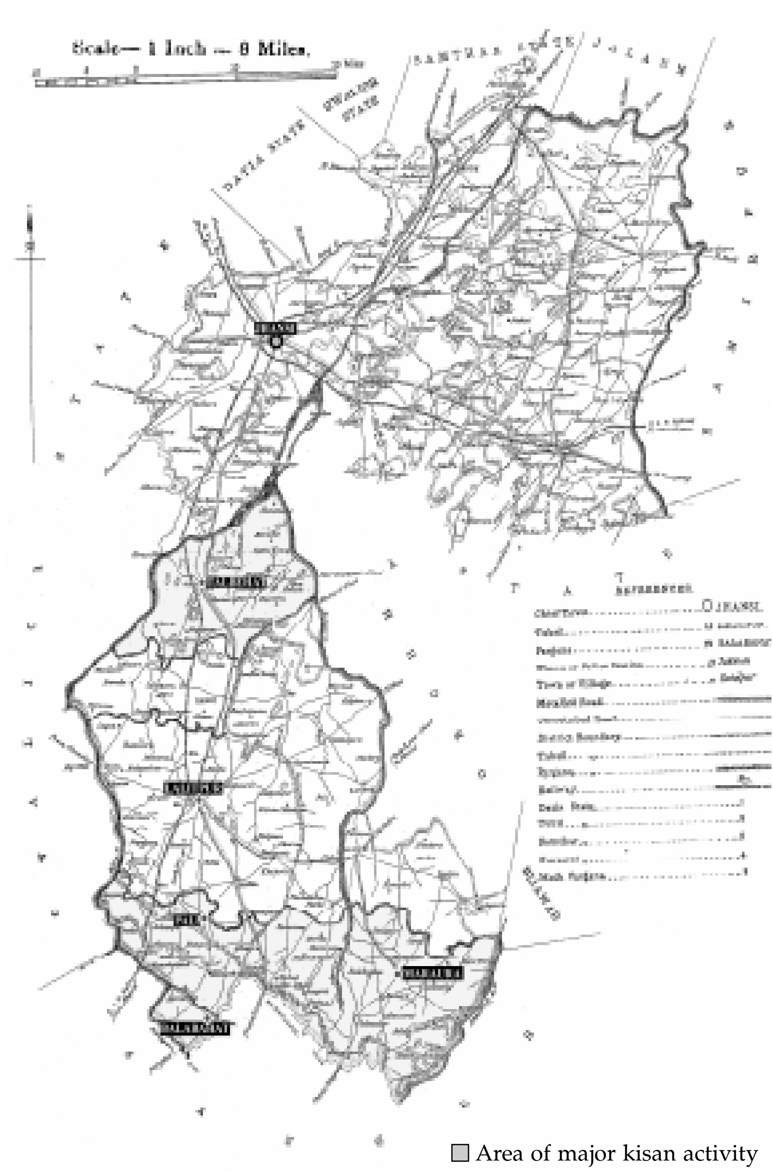
[142] *UPSA Political File 187/1939*, pp. 1–2. Tripathi's favourite statement was that the Tenancy Bill had only given one anna in the rupee.

[143] See for instance, Kisan meetings in various parts of Unnao in mid-December 1938, *PAI UP*, No. 51/1938, 10–17 December, p. 321.

[144] The meeting was held at village Rasulpur Baqi, P.S. Hasanganj, Unnao, on 4 June 1939, *PAI UP*, No. 24/1939, 3–10 June, pp. 141–42.

[145] *PAI UP*, No. 29/1939, 8–15 June, p. 179.

District Jhansi



Source: Jhansi District Gazetteer by D.L. Drake-Brockman, ICS, Allahabad, 1929.

in 1937 itself.[146] Lalitpur sub-division witnessed great tumult in the 1937–39 period. Interestingly, this was the area of greatest landlord oppression as well. The land was largely held by the Bundela *Thakurs* who exercised feudal control over the tenants and extracted high rents from them.[147]

When the zamindars of Pali, Pargana Balabehat in Lalitpur, denied traditional forest rights to the peasants, a jungle *satyagraha* was launched on 10 July 1938. A procession of 3,000 Kisans started out from Gandhi Chowk and proceeded to the forests where mass cutting of wood was undertaken.[148] Meanwhile in Pargana Madaora, tenants of a village had offered *satyagraha* against a zamindar.[149] But the zamindar retaliated with vengeance—a few weeks later, when the Mandal Congress Committee took out a procession, the zamindar's men fell upon the processionists with lathis as they entered the *bazaar*.[150] The movement in Tal Behat, further north, primarily involved the *chamars*. On 21 September 1938, a mammoth meeting of *chamars* of 64 villages was held and they were advised not to do *begar* for their zamindars. On the following day, the local Kisan Sangh organized a "*Begar Virodhi Divas*".[151] Since *begar* was extorted from tenants and agricultural labourers, the Kisan Sabha in this region mobilized a larger range of peasants. Yet, resistance to *begar* was no new slogan—it had been raised as early as in 1920–21 in Rae Bareli and Pratapgarh. In Jhansi, however, even in the 1937–39 period, zamindars would not tolerate such protest and Kisans as well as activists were badly beaten up by the zamindars' agents. In October 1938, the secretary of the Tal Behat Mandal Kisan Sangh reported that such incidents were of daily occurrence.[152] But this did not dampen the spirits of the organizers and Kisan meetings were held regularly in 1939.[153] Indeed

[146] *PAI UP*, No. 12/1937, 20–27 March; No. 46/1937, 13–20 November, p. 361. The Governor, Sir Harry Haig had observed that backward Jhansi was now showing signs of ferment. Haig to Linlithgow, 8 November 1937, *Haig Papers*, Roll 3.

[147] A.W. Pim, *Settlement Report for Jhansi District*, Allahabad, 1904–6, p. 4.

[148] *Sangharsh*, 18 July 1938, p. 16. See also *The Leader*, 15 July 1938, p. 10.

[149] *PAI UP*, No. 28/1938, 9–16 July, p. 169.

[150] *Sangharsh*, 8 August, 1938, p. 22.

[151] *Sangharsh*, 3 October 1938, p. 22.

[152] *Sangharsh*, 17 October 1938, p. 4.

[153] *PAI UP*, No. 6/1939, for week ending 4 February, p. 25; No. 8/1939, 11–18 February, p. 38; No. 10/1939, for week ending 4 March, p. 50; No. 11/1939,

the March 1939 speeches, with talk of seizing control of police stations and *tahsil* offices, were broadly similar to the rhetoric in Unnao in the same period.[154]

Who were the organizers of the Kisan Sabha in Jhansi? As suggested earlier, labour leaders of the region appear to have taken interest in the mobilization of the peasants. B.D. Dhulekar, labour leader and district-level Congressman with pro-Malaviya leanings, and Ayodhya Prasad were two prominent figures. The Jhansi movement has been described as a Communist-led movement by some Congressmen[155] and, if this were indeed so, the difference in tactics is more easily understood. The Jhansi Kisan movement was different from the mainstream Kisan agitation in the province in respect of a greater tendency to take the law into its own hands. The movement seldom, perhaps never, used the Congress ministry or the proposed Tenancy Bill as a ballast. Curiously, tactics such as organized marches to district authorities, which were marginal, were resorted to only in the later stages.[156]

From the three case studies mentioned here then, three broad types of Kisan movement can be discerned. The Fatehpur model of a movement outside the existing Congress framework, becoming strongly critical of the Congress ministry, can be applied to other districts such as Benares and Rae Bareli and Etawah to some extent, though it must be stated that the level of animosity was much lower in Fatehpur than in these other districts. The Unnao model of coalescence between Congress and Kisan activity can be applied to Gorakhpur, with Shibban Lal Saksena enjoying the same stature as B.D. Tripathi. Here, the Kisan movement tended to rely less on the UPKS and the AIKS. Jhansi remains a unique case with the only point of similarity with any other district being the

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4–11 March, p. 53; No. 12/1939, 11–18 March, p. 58; No. 13/1939, 18–25 March, p. 64; No. 15/1939, for week ending 1 April, p. 76; No. 23/1939, 27 May–3 June, p. 133; No. 32/1939, for week ending 5 August, p. 201; No. 33/1939, 5–12 August, p. 210.

[154] *PAI UP*, No. 12/1939, p. 58. For B.D. Tripathi's speeches in Unnao see *UPSA Political File 187/1939*.

[155] Interview with Rama Shankar Shukla, Maurawan, Unnao, 30 April 1986.

[156] On 2 August 1939, a procession of 50 Kisans from Babina marched to the ADM's bungalow to express their grievances. *PAI UP*, No. 32/1939, 29 July–5 August, p. 202.

involvement of labour leaders in a peasant agitation—this being true to some extent of Kanpur, Benares and Gorakhpur as well.

Elements of Sectarianism

Communist and the AIKS rhetoric tended to run along the same lines from October–November 1938 onwards. While Kanpur Communist labour leaders such as Arjun Arora exhorted peasants at Kisan Sabha meetings to "kick aside" the Congress ministry if it did not fulfil its obligations,[157] Swami Sahajanand Saraswati on his October–November tour of the province condemned the Congress ministry and asked Kisans to capture key positions in the Congress.[158] The sectarian spirit which could be found only in isolated cases in the previous period[159] became very pronounced towards the end of the year. Members of the Kisan Sabhas became strongly critical of the ministry in the months of October and November,[160] probably out of a fear that the Bihar example of a Congress–zamindar agreement over the proposed agrarian legislation would be repeated in the UP as well. The disillusionment with the Congress may be seen in the larger context of the CSP's distress with the Gandhian elements at this juncture. Nor were relations with the UPCC at their best in the second half of 1938, as we shall see in the following chapter.

The Kisan Sabha conference held at Ayodhya, along with the UP Political Conference in December 1938, went some way towards bridging the gap. Jawaharlal Nehru, the President of the Political Conference, had appealed to the Kisans to accept the Tenancy Bill as the first instalment of their rights.[161] Acharya Narendra Dev, who had taken over as President of the UPKS, pleaded for greater unity between Congress and the Kisan Sabha and regretted the

[157] *PAI UP*, No. 42/1938, 8–15 October, p. 264.

[158] *PAI UP*, No. 44/1938, for week ending 5 November, p. 279.

[159] Kisan volunteers of Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar and Ambala were told in March 1938 that they were *not* Congress volunteers. *PAI UP*, No. 14/1938, for week ending 2 April, p. 89. In late July 1938, Kisan Sabhaites in Benares, in an attempt to rally numbers round the Kisan Sabha, criticized the Congress Party and its workers. *PAI UP*, No. 31/1938, 23–30 July, p. 188.

[160] *PAI UP*, Nos. 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 and 49/1938 for October–November.

[161] *Sangharsh*, 8 January 1939, p. 13.

friction between the two.[162] The spirit of reconciliation at the Conference had the desired effect, at least temporarily. Police reporters at Kisan meetings noted that anti-ministry rhetoric was less in evidence in early 1939 and anti-zamindar and anti-British speeches assumed preponderance.[163] Since the Tenancy Bill was making good progress in the Legislative Assembly, impatience on this score was also reduced.

But from mid-May onwards Kisan Sabha feelings towards the ministry once again became negative.[164] Two reasons can be cited: one, the Tenancy Bill was once again threatened with landlord opposition, this time in the Legislative Council, where the landlords were in a majority. The Bill was again referred to a Select Committee of the Council and faced with further delay.[165] The other cause for misgivings was a circular issued by the UP Chief Secretary to all District Magistrates recommending the same kind of punitive action against those preaching "class hatred" as was proposed for those indulging in communal propaganda.[166] Following these instructions there were a number of arrests in the months of June, July and August 1939.[167]

The issue of Subhas Chandra Bose and the stiff attitude of the AICC on questions like *satyagraha* in mid-1939 left the Kisan Sabha leadership dismayed and critical of the Congress leadership. In August 1939, a joint statement issued by Mohanlal Gautam, B.P. Sinha and Jogesh Chatterji, all important Kisan leaders in the UP, stated that the present leadership was leading the Congress on to

[162] *PAI UP*, No. 1/1939, 24–31 December 1938, p. 1.

[163] *PAI UP*, No. 17/1939, 15–22 April, pp. 88, 95. It was noted, for instance, that Raj Deo Singh's speech at a Kisan Sabha meeting in Kheri was confined to "criticism of the local zamindars". Similar observations were made about meetings in Rae Bareli, Unnao, Fatehpur and Meerut.

[164] *PAI UP*, No. 26/1939, 17–24 June, p. 157. See speeches at Kisan Conference in Jaswantnagar, Etawah, *PAI UP*, No. 31/1939, 22–29 July, p. 194.

[165] *Sangharsh*, 9 July 1939, p. 10.

[166] *Sangharsh*, 25 July 1939, p. 10. See also Chapter 3. Also *AICC* PL2/1939.

[167] Rajdeo Singh and some others were arrested in Jaunpur on 20 June. Searches were also conducted in this district. *Sangharsh*, 25 June 1939, p. 16. On 19 June, the police conducted searches in Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Ghazipur, Benares and Gonda, though these were supposed to be in connection with dacoities. *Sangharsh*, 2 July 1939, p. 20. Keshav Prasad Varma of Lucknow complained that he was being tailed by three CID officers when he toured Mirzapur, Gorakhpur and Basti. *Sangharsh*, 20 August 1939, p. 22.

the path of constitutionalism. They expressed their determination to fight the attempt to impose *ahimsa*.[168]

Swami Sahajanand Saraswati's 12 instructions to Kisans planning to launch *satyagraha* (presumably in defiance of the Congress resolution banning indiscriminate use of *satyagraha* June 1939) make interesting reading. Issued in August 1939, they emphasized the need for peaceful methods including restraint from abuses of the police, the need to ascertain the Kisan's real rights on the land from which he was evicted, etc.[169] The instructions were intended for Bihar but could apply to the UP as well. They would have been more useful, however, had they been issued a few months earlier. Talk of *satyagraha* had subsided in the UP by this time. Sahajanand's last tour of the province in the ministry phase had been undertaken in May 1939 and the sectarian spirit had been in evidence.[170]

The AIKS was moving closer to the Forward Bloc by June–July 1939. Sahajanand, who first felt that Subhas Bose should be restrained from forming a separate party, later acquiesced and envisaged a link between the "Kisan movement in the villages" and the "Forward Bloc in the towns".[171] Meanwhile, his disgust with the Congress ministries was becoming stronger. There was no more talk of Congress–Kisan Sabha unity. He suggested that 9 July be observed as "All India Kisan Prisoners Day" to protest against the arrests of Kisan leaders.[172] As for the AICC decision to disallow *satyagraha* unless sanctioned by the PCC, his comment was:

> The initiative of direct action or Satyagraha is the very breath of the nostrils of these organisations.... If the zamindars came to know that the Kisans have become Congress-minded and they cannot take to direct action without the permission of the

[168] *Sangharsh*, 20 August 1939, p. 3.

[169] *Ibid*., p. 4.

[170] The main themes of the Swami's speeches were: (*a*) the ministry was not truly representative of peasant interests; (*b*) Kisans must not listen to the Premier, for their interests lay with the Kisan Sabha; and (*c*) the Kisans must try to finish the zamindari system. *PAI UP*, No. 21/1939, 13–20 May, p. 118. Also see *Sangharsh*, 28 May 1939, p. 16.

[171] Sahajanand to Indulal Yagnik, 17 July 1939 and Yagnik to Sahajanand, 26 July 1939, *Indulal Yagnik Papers*, Subject File 11, pp. 275 and 287 respectively.

[172] Sahajanand to all Provincial Secretaries, 1 July 1939, *Indulal Yagnik Papers*, Subject File 11, p. 269.

> Congress they will make simultaneous attacks not only on the fields, but the ready crops of the Kisans.[173]

Considering that *satyagraha* had actually been resorted to only by one Kisan Sabha unit in the UP, this reaction seems a little exaggerated.

By August–September 1939, the Kisan Sabha movement in the UP had taken a back seat. Damodar Swarup Seth chided the Kisan committees for not doing any work.[174] This was not true of all district-level units however. Unnao, Gorakhpur and Fatehpur maintained a respectable level of work.[175] But these were islands in an ocean of Kisan inactivity and lethargy.

The looming shadow of a second World War also diverted Kisan activists' attention to larger political issues, such as non-participation in the war. There were a large number of anti-war and anti-recruitment speeches in August 1939.[176]

Despite its affiliation to the AIKS, 1939 was thus an indeterminate and unsatisfactory year for the UPKS. The peak had been reached in 1938. Yet even that effort could not compare with the movement of 1920–21 or the 1930–32 movement. On both those occasions the Kisans had been on the offensive; now, during the tenure of the ministry, they were only on the defensive most of the time, warding off acts of aggression by the zamindars. This makes us go back to the postulation that the agrarian movement flourished in a larger political context. Since the Congress itself was in a phase of less active conflict with the forces of imperialism, did the agrarian movement also tend to reflect the same spirit?

The Kisan Sabha effort in the UP was a highly uneven one. Where the leadership was strong, the peasants were able to put up stiff resistance to the landlords; where the organization was weak, peasants continued to be oppressed.[177] There were at least three

[173] Sahajanand's Press Statement, 2 July 1939, *ibid*., p. 261.

[174] *Sangharsh*, 20 August 1939, p. 16.

[175] *PAI UP*, Nos. 38 and 39/1939 for weeks 9–16 September and 16–23 September respectively.

[176] Acharya Narendra Dev toured Ghazipur, Ballia, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur in mid-August 1939, making anti-war speeches. *PAI UP*, No. 34/1939, 12–19 August, p. 213.

[177] There were reports from Fyzabad, as late as in August 1939 of oppression of tenants in various ways by zamindars, *Sangharsh*, 13 August 1939, p. 16. This is not to imply that there was no Kisan organization in Fyzabad, or that

levels of leadership in the UP Kisan movement, each with an ideology of its own. At the district level there was a motley collection of semi-religious figures, Socialists, Communists, Gandhian-type Congressmen, ex-revolutionary terrorists, etc. At the provincial level there was a broad Socialist stream that tried in vain to shape and regulate the movement. At the all-India level there was a partly Socialist, partly non-Socialist leadership, which, despite its professions of Congress–Kisan Sabha unity, tended to berate and run down the Congress in an effort to shine by comparison. Perhaps the UP alone had to contend with such a wide variety of leaders for its Kisan movement, since in Andhra and Bihar, the provincial and all-India levels would at least be homogenous.

The AIKS report for the year 1939–40 declared the UP Kisan movement to be behind that of Bihar, Andhra and Punjab.[178] The Provincial Kisan Sangh was held responsible for not being able "to consolidate effectively the movements and activities going on in various districts."[179] Somewhat belatedly, it acknowledged the worth of the UP Tenancy Act which was described as "a decided advance on previous ones" and which "goes a long way in securing the overdue rights of the Kisans of that Province."[180]

To the query as to why was the Kisan movement relatively weak in the UP, we can offer two tentative answers. One, that the other provinces mentioned above were witnessing a powerful agrarian movement for the first time, whereas the UP was going through a third agrarian upheaval. A movement in its first stage always draws upon greater reserves and vigour, which is also necessary to face the greater odds. We have seen how, within the UP, some districts which had not participated in the earlier no-rent campaigns but had been awakened in 1938–39, produced a more vigorous movement. The lower scale of mobilization could also be owing to the Congress ministry's own efforts to legislate on

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zamindar oppression ceased to exist in areas of militant Kisan activity. The difference was one of degree.

[178] Report presented at AIKS session at Vizag, 26–27 March 1940. The UP membership figure of 38,000 ranked third after Bihar—53,843 and Punjab—48,000, p. 4. *JA*, File 1940/5. Another set of figures given by N.G. Ranga and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati in their *History of the Kisan Movement* puts the Bihar membership at 250,000, Punjab at 73,000 and Andhra at 75,000.

[179] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[180] *Ibid.*

behalf of the tenants. There was less confrontation between the establishment and the peasant movement.

In the UP as we have seen, there was a greater receptivity on the part of the existing Congress organization to the Kisan Sabha movement, so that a separate movement was not always necessary. In a few cases the district Congress unit itself became a Kisan Sabha. In parts of western UP, Rae Bareli and Benares, however, the two organizations were not on good terms with each other. In some districts Kisans even distrusted the Sabha and indicated their preference for the Congress. Given a Congress organization with a two-decade old association with peasant problems, it must have been rather difficult for the Kisan Sabha to establish a separate identity in the province.

Was the Congress ministry or the PCC responsible in any way for the weakness of the Kisan movement? Did the preventive arrests act as a dampener? If that were so, then the Bihar Kisan Sabha would have been extinguished in 1937 itself. As for the UPCC, despite moves against the Sabha such as denial of the use of Congress offices to them, it did not either prevent Congressmen from working in the Kisan Sabha nor did it debar active Kisan Sabhaites from the Congress.

SIX

The Fabric of the Congress Organization: The UPCC, 1937–39

Holding the different strands of the Congress in the UP in its hands and attempting to knit them together was the United Provinces Congress Committee (UPCC). At one level it was a mere committee: subordinate to the AICC and responsible for the Congress organization in the UP. At another level it was the barometer that reflected the changing political configurations in the province.

As will be seen later, the UPCC tried to assume the role of mediator between the ministry and the radical Congress activists on issues such as the Kanpur labour strike of May 1938, the referring of the UP Tenancy Bill to the Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Working Committee, the question of individual Congressmen or committees resorting to *satyagraha* on their own and the relationship with the Kisan Sabhas. Subhas Bose's challenge to the Congress High Command in early 1939 also created some interesting polarizations in the UP Congress, which will be outlined. In passing, we shall also trace the extent to which the growing communal problem was taken note of by the UPCC and the steps adopted to deal with it.

Building a Grass Roots Organization

In 1936, all PCC constitutions had undergone certain changes. Among the proposed changes in the UPCC constitution (largely

CSP sponsored) was one to have primary Congress Committees in every village.[1] In effect, village-level primary Congress offices were set up only during the Congress election campaign of 1936–37, usually in the vicinity of a polling-booth.[2] And then, when the Congress ministry was formed, clusters of village-level Congress offices ranging from 40 to 100, constituted themselves into Mandal Congress Committees.[3] In some districts, such as Basti, MCCs were already in existence, prior to the formation of the ministry.[4] These MCCs, then, became the grass roots Congress units, replacing the earlier *tahsil*-level organization.

The thrust of the 1936 changes in the UPCC constitution was towards the democratization of the PCC, by providing for the consultation of all primary members on major matters. It was suggested that all resolutions to be put before district or provincial political conferences and DCCs be first circulated among the primary committees for discussion. It was also laid down that all primary members should meet at least twice every year and that elections to all village and *mohalla*-level Congress committees *must* be direct and not on the earlier group basis.[5] Unfortunately, we have no record of whether these instructions were duly followed. The Congress Socialists did take the whole programme seriously in the beginning. A mass contacts questionnaire was circulated to all the district and local committees, but we have on record replies from only two committees, that is, the Lucknow City Congress Committee and the Basti District Congress Committee.[6] Many Congress committees apparently did not send replies to the questionnaire. Given the unprecedented rise in primary Congress membership during the 1937–39 period[7] and the pressures on the Congress organization due to the work of the Congress ministry, such instructions could well-nigh have been overlooked and the

[1] Memorandum on Mass Contact, UP, *JP Papers*, INC File 116, pp. 103–7.

[2] See Chapter 1, section on election campaign.

[3] Interview with Ramakant Pandey, Rae Bareli, April, 1986. See also Jawaharlal Nehru's piece "The United Provinces Congress", January 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 9, pp. 456–57.

[4] Memorandum on Mass Contact, UP, *JP Papers*, INC File 116, pp. 103–7.

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] *JP Papers*, INC File 116, pp. 104, 161–64, 84–86 respectively.

[7] From 88,620 in September 1937 to 1,450,000 in December 1938. *AICC*/G-78/1937–38, p. 1; *Sangharsh*, 5 December 1938, p. 12.

earlier practice of primary members meeting only at election time and during political conferences may very well have persisted.

From the time that the Congress ministry was constituted, the UPCC was drawn into its activities. It visualized itself as the conscience-keeper of the ministry. The deliberations at Executive Council (EC) meetings in this period reveal the extent to which ministerial matters became the concern of the UP Congress. At the very first meeting of the EC on 12 September 1937, C.B. Gupta (himself an MLA) moved a resolution asking the UP Assembly and Council Congress parties not to take any member into the Congress party without the consent of the Executive Council. Another resolution drew the ministry's attention to cases of police terror in the province.[8] On 18 November, the EC passed a series of resolutions, which would form the outline of the draft Tenancy Bill.[9]

However, very soon Nehru and Sri Prakasa expressed their disapproval of this tendency for "Congress committees to review the work of Ministers and for individual Congressmen either to take a subservient attitude of unctuous acquiescence or a haughty attitude of carping criticism from a high and superior pedestal".[10] Instead, PCCs were advised to maintain a certain distance from the functioning of the ministries.[11] Nehru also tried to evolve a code of conduct for Congressmen in the UP:

> So far, individual Congressmen have been saying much what they pleased.... Every Congressman must have full instructions about Congress aims and endeavours; and while speaking, must not go beyond them. Instructions are necessary as to what we say, if required, on religion, communal problems, economic aims, social relations, culture, language, etc.[12]

[8] *UPCC Executive Council Proceedings* (henceforth *UPCC EC Proceedings*), 12 September 1937. The second resolution ran thus: "This Council is distressed by the fact that in many districts of the Province, particularly Gorakhpur, Mainpuri and Bulandshahar, the police is spreading terror and false cases are being instituted against Congress workers. The Council draws the attention of the Ministry to this matter and hopes that necessary action will be taken."

[9] *UPCC EC Proceedings*, 18 November 1937.

[10] This was at a meeting of UPCC workers in Benares on 7 December 1937. *AICC*/P-20(iii)/1937.

[11] *Ibid*.

[12] *Ibid*.

Thus, an attempt was made to present a united front to the world but given the sheer diversity of politics in the UP, this was no easy task.

Differences within the UPCC

The question of who would become President of the UPCC in 1938 became a tricky one. It was the usual practice to have the President of the annual provincial political conference going on to become President of the UPCC for the ensuing year. Five names, (those of Acharya Kripalani, Dr Murari Lal, Damodar Swarup Seth, Sampurnanand and Mohanlal Saksena) had been proposed for the Presidentship of the political Conference to be held at Aligarh from 28–30 November.[13] Almost instantaneously, lobbying began with Balkrishna Sharma asking J.B. Kripalani to withdraw in favour of Dr Murari Lal[14] (who was a Kanpur Congressman like Balkrishna Sharma, and President of the Kanpur City Congress Committee in 1936). The former along with Sampurnanand and D.S. Seth withdrew from the field, leaving two contestants, Dr Murari Lal and Mohanlal Saksena.

In early November, Dr Murari Lal was first declared elected as President of the Political Conference by 24 votes to 22,[15] but the decision was challenged by a certain group of Lucknow Congressmen, championing the cause of Mohanlal Saksena.[16] It may be recalled that Mohanlal Saksena had been involved in a claim for General Secretaryship of the Lucknow Congress in 1936.[17] This

[13] UPCC Secretary's note to J.B. Kripalani, 14 September 1937, *AICC*/P-20(i)/1937, p. 187.

[14] *Ibid*. Note dated 16 September 1937.

[15] See Harish Chandra Bajpai's statement to *Sainik*, 15 November 1937, *AICC*/P-20(i)/1937, pp. 15–15A.

[16] Gopinath Srivastava and Harish Chandra Bajpai in particular. Bajpai claimed that Murari Lal had only got 21 votes since three districts (Banda, Bulandshahar and Bareilly) had no proper DCCs functioning and therefore no right to vote. Bajpai also claimed that some districts had been made to change their minds and transfer their vote to Dr Murari Lal. Statement made to *Sainik*, 15 November 1937. Bajpai was severely reprimanded by Nehru for having gone to the Press on this matter. Letter from Nehru to Bajpai, dated 24 December 1937, *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1937.

[17] *AICC*/P-20(i)/1934, p. 199.

group even took the matter to the AICC, which refused to intervene.[18] Finally, the matter was referred to the EC meeting of the UPCC on 16 November. Largely through the efforts of Jawaharlal Nehru, Saksena was ultimately elected President of the Provincial Political Conference. Two months later, Nehru managed to prevail upon the major Murari Lal supporters to unanimously elect Mohanlal Saksena as President of the UPCC.[19]

This was not a happy beginning for the new UPCC. Provincial politics had polarized sharply into pro- and anti-Saksena camps. Nehru was trying to heal the breach: he had first championed Murari Lal's cause, but then, seeing the bitter feelings, convinced himself that it was "absolutely immaterial who was elected President"[20] and thereafter actively lobbied for Saksena. To him, the election of a "proper Secretary" and "other office bearers and Council" was more important. He hoped that an executive, enjoying the general confidence of the PCC, would be formed.[21]

The UPCC of 1938 had five Vice Presidents: Nehru, Acharya Narendra Dev, Husain Ahmed Madni, Sampurnanand and J.B. Kripalani.[22] R.S. Pandit, K.D. Malaviya and Mahabir Tyagi were the secretaries. Among the members of the EC were radicals like Vishnu Saran Dublish, Damodar Swarup Seth, Thakur Malkhan Singh and Dr Murari Lal himself. Would Mohanlal Saksena, a seasoned Congressman with plenty of organizational experience, be able to steer his vessel safely through?

It was in his relationship with the Kisan Sabha that the new President of the UPCC encountered rough weather. The behaviour of the UPKS, both in word and deed, had been causing some

[18] Nehru to Gopinath Srivastava, 9 November 1937, *AICC*/P- 20(i)/1937, p. 69.

[19] On 8 January 1938, Nehru sent a set of identically-worded notes to Damodar Swarup Seth, Acharya Narendra Dev, Sampurnanand, Purshottamdas Tandon, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, K.D. Malaviya and Narmada Pratap Singh, calling for an "end to all party canvassing", the unanimous election of Mohanlal Saksena and the need for a "strong Council and Secretariat which has the confidence of all groups in the PCC." *AICC*/P-20(i)/1937, pp. 187–203.

[20] This was stated in a letter to Acharya Narendra Dev, dated 9 November 1937, *AICC*/P-20(i)/1937, p. 73.

[21] Letter to Kidwai dated 8 January 1938, *ibid.*, p. 201.

[22] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1938, 15–22 January, p. 26.

concern to the ministry as well as to senior Congressmen in the UP.[23] The proposed Kisan march to the Council Chamber on 20 April 1938 had irked the ministry greatly. Though it was finally abandoned, it left the Socialists feeling rather let down. It was to have been the first such march under the auspices of the Provincial Kisan Sangh.[24] They were also upset at the way Jawaharlal Nehru had acted in the situation.[25]

At the 24 April meeting of the UPCC, a heated discussion on the role of the Kisan Sabha took place. The details of the discussion were not made public. Mohanlal Saksena had apparently had some strong differences of opinion with his colleagues, presumably Acharya Narendra Dev and others. At the end of the meeting, Nehru appeared rather distressed at Saksena's handling of affairs and, more so, his inability to carry various elements of the PCC with him. He bluntly wrote to Saksena: "If you cannot carry a man like Narendra Dev with you in any important matter the blame must inevitably rest largely on you."[26]

Immediately after this incident, Nehru announced his decision to leave for Europe. Congress affairs, both of the national and provincial varieties, appeared to have worn him down greatly.[27] After having played the role of principal architect in the formation of the new UPCC, and having seen his carefully prepared plans for balancing the various forces in the Committee come to naught, he threw up his hands and retreated from the scene, having decided

[23] "I have received reports from some districts that the people of Kisan Sabhas create disputes with Congress *mandals*.... Such disputes only tend to weaken the strength of Congress." Jawaharlal Nehru's speech at Allahabad on 26 November 1937, *SWJN*, Vol. 8, p. 366.

[24] Acharya Narendra Dev's telegram to Nehru, dated 16 April 1938, *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1938, p. 219.

[25] Nehru had sent a note to the UPCC General Secretary on 14 April 1938 expressing the view that it was "highly undesirable that repeated demonstrations should be held before the Council Chamber...the whole object of such demonstrations is thus frustrated by making them cheap and ludicrous". *SWJN*, Vol. 8, pp. 383–84. He also simultaneously issued the statement to the Press. This was what hurt the Socialists most—the fact that, rather than sending a telegraphic or telephonic message to Acharya Narendra Dev or Mohanlal Gautam, Nehru had made a public statement on the matter. Damodar Swarup Seth to Nehru, 18 April 1938, *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1938, p. 219.

[26] Letter dated 29 April 1938, *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1938, p. 229.

[27] Letter to Mahatma Gandhi, dated 28 April 1938, *SWJN*, Vol. 8, pp. 387–88.

to sail from Bombay on 2 June for Europe. Until his departure, however, he was in the thick of political matters. After attending the UPCC meeting of 22 May, he drafted the much-awaited statement "On the Congress Attitude Towards Kisan Sabhas" in which it was stated: "Some individuals unable to find a place in the district Congress executives have sought to organize Kisan Sabhas locally which might give them greater prominence."[28]

Kisan Sabhas working in opposition to the Congress, the statement said, must not be encouraged. This was not to say that Congressmen should keep out of Kisan Sabhas, which could then become the preserves of non-Congressmen. Kisan organizations were "desirable" but they must work in coordination with the Congress.

Nehru had warned Saksena that, in the ensuing months, there were greater possibilities of friction in the PCC and that he would not be on the scene to apply the salve.[29] But the President of the UPCC was apparently in no mood to avert a crisis. He was greatly disturbed by the functioning of the Kisan Sabhas in the province. A UPCC circular in early July 1938 called for details of the working of these organizations.[30] It was suspected that, in some cases, Congress malcontents had assumed positions of importance in Kisan Sabha units. Veteran Congressman Manzar Ali Sokhta proposed to move a resolution at the 10 July session of the UPCC, calling upon all subordinate Congress committees to dissociate themselves from organizations which had been set up parallel to the Congress, and which were opposed to the Congress in their principles and policies. The DCCs were also enjoined to take disciplinary action against those who continued their "improper and subversive activities", which included "open fomentation of violence and class war and opposition to Congress official programmes and policies", "the maligning and defaming of prominent Congress workers and local office-bearers and the declarations of Congress itself as a capitalist body".[31] The thrust of this resolution was explicitly anti-Kisan Sabha but it did not come up for discussion until the October meeting of the UPCC.

[28] *SWJN*, Vol. 8, pp. 391–92.

[29] Letter of 29 April 1938, *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1938, p. 229.

[30] *AICC Papers*, File 17/1938, p. 163.

[31] *AICC*/B-6/1938.

The 10 July UPCC meeting had been called to discuss recommendations of the various DCCs on the Tenancy Bill. The meeting witnessed a debate on the extent to which the UPCC should comment on the Bill. R.S. Pandit was of the view that only the broad principles should be discussed, and that the details should be left to the Congress party in the Legislature. He also felt that the Committee should take no such decisions as would cause embarrassment to the government. The militants, Z.A. Ahmed, B.D. Tripathi and Mohanlal Gautam strongly disagreed with this. They felt that all PCC decisions must be binding on the Congress party in the Legislature and further, that the PCC had the liberty to change its own decisions whenever it was thought necessary.[32]

Clearly, the Left was on the warpath at this meeting. They wanted a 50 per cent reduction in rent.[33] The UPCC finally passed a resolution calling for 50 per cent reduction in the total rental demand of the province within six months of the passing of the Tenancy Bill. This reduction, it was stated, should be distributed on different holdings on the basis of soil classification and other factors.[34] However, when the Premier made an appeal to the Committee to reconsider the matter, since a 50 per cent reduction would completely dislocate the budget, the resolution was reopened for discussion. Finally, an amended resolution, calling for 33 per cent reduction in rent was passed.[35] But the later meeting witnessed stormy scenes.

After the July meeting, the UPCC also adopted a series of resolutions which seemed to indicate greater sensitivity to the ministry's predicament. For instance, a PCC circular of 27 July 1938 asked Congressmen not to interfere with police investigations.[36] Two days earlier, another circular had virtually turned down a request of some Congress committees for permission to launch *satyagraha* on the grounds that "in the Province Congress Ministries are in existence" and, therefore, the position of Congress committees had greatly changed.[37] Even earlier, on 2 July 1938, another circular

[32] *The Leader*, 11 July 1938, p. 10.

[33] M.N. Roy's proposed resolution at the UPCC meeting. *The Leader*, 10 July 1938, p. 12.

[34] *The Leader*, 11 July 1938, p. 10.

[35] *The Leader*, 13 July 1938, p. 3.

[36] *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1938.

[37] UPCC Circular, 25 July 1938, *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1938, p. 96. The Fatehpur DCC had written to the PCC for permission to start a *satyagraha* against a

had asked Congressmen to exert their influence on tenants to pay rents on time. The circular called for reports of cases where the zamindar was the aggressor and also of cases where the *tenant was the aggressor*.[38]

Mohanlal Saksena may have been responsible for the tone of many of these circulars. But it must be borne in mind that their content was in accordance with the instructions emanating from the Working Committee at this time. The Congress Working Committee at its Delhi session had deprecated Congressmen's interference in the day-to-day administration, their interventions in judicial investigations, their calling of panchayats and handing out of punishments to alleged culprits.[39] Such resolutions sounded the death knell for parallel government efforts. On the other hand, Congressmen, by intervening in the routine working of the law, had created some embarrassing situations. In May 1938, Biswanath Mukerji, the Congress MLA-cum-president of the Gorakhpur Mazdur and Kisan Sabha, was found guilty of contempt of court for his apparent interference in a theft case while it was *sub judice*.[40]

Once the Tenancy Bill was introduced in the Legislative Assembly, the ministry felt that it needed all the support that could be mustered. Since there were so many critics and opponents of the Bill, both outside the party and within (50 Congress-zamindar MLAs were reportedly putting pressure for amendments),[41] the ministry appealed to the UPCC not to be critical of its shortcomings. This put the UPCC in an awkward situation. If the Committee responded to this appeal it stood in danger of playing second fiddle to the ministry. Nevertheless the Tenancy Sub-Committee formed by the PCC in April 1938 reserved its reactions to the Bill until the

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problematic zamindar of Khaga *tahsil* but had been refused the permission. *Sangharsh*, 1 August 1938, p. 16.

[38] Circular No. 47 of the UPCC issued by R.S. Pandit, General Secretary, UPCC, *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1938, p. 81.

[39] *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938, p. 287. Proceedings of Congress Working Committee, Delhi, 22 September–2 October 1938, N.N. Mitra, *IAR*, 1938, Vol. II, p. 282. See also UPCC Circular No. 70, 16 November 1938.

[40] Mukerji had apparently written two letters to the *tahsildars* handling the case, stating that he had made independent enquiries into the case and wished to compare his findings with the *tahsildar*'s. *The Leader*, 4 May 1938, p. 6.

[41] *The Leader*, 1 May 1938, p. 10.

Parliamentary Party had scrutinized it.[42] The Sub-Committee subsequently held lively discussions on the draft Bill at its sessions in June 1938.[43] But when, in October 1938, there was talk of intervention by the Central Congress Parliamentary Sub-Committee to try and reach an agreement with the zamindars on the Bill, the UPCC felt compelled to speak out. Throughout the months of July and August 1938, Kisans in several parts of the province were being evicted by panic-stricken zamindars before the introduction of the new Bill.[44] A strongly-worded statement was issued:

> The Government proposals are quite modest and inadequate to give a sufficiently large measure of relief to the peasantry.... The big Zamindars are forcibly dispossessing their tenants in order to deprive them of the new rights that might accrue to them under the new Act.... The Government has gone far to appease them.... The new proposals in consequence fall far short of the proposals enunciated in our Agrarian Programme and the recommendations of the PCC.... The peasantry is getting restive and if the process is not speeded up and all talk of compromise with the big zamindars is not given up it is bound to lead to disastrous results.[45]

This statement earned the UPCC a reprimand from the Congress Working Committee.[46]

Another issue, which found the UPCC in a similarly ambiguous position, was the Kanpur workers' strike of May 1938. While desirous of working in harmony with the Congress ministry, which

[42] The Committee consisted of Acharya Narendra Dev, Lal Bahadur Shastri, B.D. Tripathi, Shibbanlal Saksena, A.P. Jain, Dr Md. Ashraf and S.K.D. Paliwal, *UPCC EC Proceedings*, 24 April 1938.

[43] A three day meeting was held from 25 to 27 June. Among the resolutions passed was one that *sir* should be reduced from 100 to 50 acres, Kisans lands should not be seized and there should be no *bedakhli. Sangharsh*, 4 July 1938, p. 17.

[44] In Benares, zamindars were taking back their *sir* lands cultivated by tenants for many years, so that tenants would get no rights on them. *Sangharsh*, 18 July 1938, p. 16. The same was true of Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Ballia, Basti, Ghazipur, etc. *Sangharsh*, 11 July 1938, p. 17.

[45] Resolution of the Tenancy Sub-Committee of the UPCC, *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938–39, pp. 73–75.

[46] The UP Governor's report, 10 October 1938, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

took a friendly but neutral stand on the strike, PCC sympathies were clearly with the striking workers. (The strike had been a wholly spontaneous one, the workers having refused advice from the local Congress committee to wait a while.) On record, we have three statements from the UPCC on the Kanpur strike: one, passed at its meeting of 28 May 1938 stated that, while noting with deep regret that workers of Kanpur had declared a general strike without due notice and without waiting for the government's decision on the Inquiry Committee report, it realized that the workers had great provocation and were compelled to strike. It congratulated the workers on their self-discipline.[47] Mohanlal Saksena's own statement expressed wonder at the lack of bitterness among the workers despite their "grim struggle with hunger and starvation". He called upon all subordinate Congress committees to give full support to the strikers.[48] Damodar Swarup Seth, one of the organizing secretaries, known for his sharply worded statements, went one step further in supporting the strikers. He wanted to move a resolution at the next UPCC meeting condemning the Congress ministry's attitude of benevolent neutrality towards the strike.[49]

As may be seen clearly from the statements made earlier, the fabric of the PCC had worn dangerously thin and it would require a massive effort and much goodwill to prevent the various elements from tearing it apart. The combination of Jawaharlal Nehru's absence, Mohanlal Saksena's tactlessness, the ministry's expectations and the aggressiveness and impatience of PCC members like Damodar Swarup Seth and Mohanlal Gautam was not a happy one. The gentle presence of Acharya Narendra Dev was probably the only redeeming factor. Indeed, one gets the feeling that the controversial circulars and resolutions of July–August 1938 referred to earlier were passed only because of the restraint advised by the Acharya.[50] It was also perhaps at his instance that the UPKS

[47] *The Leader*, 24 May 1938, p. 4.

[48] *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1938, p. 132.

[49] *The Pioneer*, 21 May 1938, p. 1.

[50] Acharya Narendra Dev, in his speeches at this time, for example like the one given at the District Kisan Sammelan, Utraula, Kanpur, on 27 June 1938 tried to explain the predicament of the Congress under provincial autonomy, the plus points of the Tenancy Bill, etc. *Sangharsh*, 4 July 1938, p. 16. Even Mohanlal Gautam in a mammoth District Kisan Sangh meeting at Unnao on 18 September 1938 said that the ministry was trying to do its best for the Kisans. *Sangharsh*, 19 September 1938.

sent out a circular to all its subordinate units in August 1938, stating that there must be no rivalry between the Congress and the Kisan Sangh and that it was as important for Kisan workers to strengthen the Congress as it was to strengthen the Kisan movement.

Yet, the President, Mohanlal Saksena, felt that matters were getting out of hand and that he was no longer able to head the Committee. In his resignation letter, dated 20 August 1938, he expressed unhappiness with those who differed with the PCC's leadership and made a "public display" of these differences, and with those who went about propagating that they should not expect any good from the Congress—this he described as "nothing short of treason".[51] Perhaps Saksena had reason enough to feel hurt, but one cannot help feeling that the threat of resignation was, above all, an admission of his own incompetence. Recalcitrant elements in the PCC could have been dealt with, with dignity and tact. Members of the Kisan Sabha, as seen earlier, were amenable to reason and if Saksena had strengthened the more reasonable elements within this body, rather than condemned the whole organization as he did on several occasions, a rapport may have been achieved. Saksena's inability to win the confidence of Acharya Narendra Dev must certainly have been a major handicap. To add to his woes, an expulsion order served by him on a Barabanki CSP worker and editor of a small newspaper was revoked by the UPCC at its 10 July meeting.[52]

Mohanlal Saksena's resignation letter was placed at the PCC meeting of mid-October, which persuaded him to withdraw it. The Socialists themselves argued that this was the best course, since there were barely two-and-a-half months of his term remaining and there was little point in getting involved with fresh elections at this stage.[53] Nevertheless, the meeting elected Jawaharlal Nehru as President of the next Provincial Political Conference to be held at Ayodhya, Fyzabad at the end of the year.[54] It seemed that, after the disastrous experience of Saksena's Presidentship, the Committee had decided that the reins of the UP Congress were safer in Nehru's hands.

Congress–Kisan Sabha relations once again figured at the October UPCC meeting. Manzar Ali Sokhta's resolution against

[51] *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938, pp. 23–25.

[52] *Sangharsh*, 18 July 1938, p. 16. The person involved was Ramgopal Sushil.

[53] *Sangharsh*, 24 October 1938, p. 10.

[54] *Ibid*.

the Kisan Sabhas, which he had apparently been wanting to place before the UPCC since the previous December, came up for discussion.[55] It was defeated, however, and a less sharply worded, more amiable resolution proposed by Purshottamdas Tandon adopted. According to that resolution, the PCC deplored the entry of large numbers of selfish people into the Congress who did not believe in its principles. Congress principles, the resolution stressed, must be preserved.[56] The Socialist members of the Kisan Sabha accepted this resolution and even congratulated themselves on not having come off too badly at the meeting.[57]

But the complacency was short-lived. An EC meeting of the UPCC held after the October meeting, prohibited Congressmen from associating with those Kisan Sabhas which did not use the tricolour flag or which had, amongst their functionaries, those against whom the PCC had taken disciplinary action. A circular issued on 16 November 1938 prohibited other organizations from using the UPCC and other Congress offices with immediate effect.[58] All those who indulged in criticism of the ministry were warned that disciplinary action could be taken against them.[59] (To this, the Kisan Sabha retaliated by passing a resolution at the end of the year at Ayodhya to the effect that disciplinary action must be taken by the UPCC EC against all those who maligned the Kisan Sabha as well.[60]) Kisan Sabha spokesmen were also dismayed at the UPCC's silence on the arrest of some Kisan Sabha leaders and prosecutions of others, especially in Benares district, around this time.[61]

On the Select Committee report on the draft Tenancy Bill, released in October 1938, the PCC maintained a discreet silence. Earlier, one of the UPCC's recommendations had been that only zamindars paying revenue of up to Rs 100 should be allowed to retain *sir* lands. The Select Committee report extended this privilege to zamindars paying up to Rs 250 as land revenue.[62] The suggestion that *sir* area be limited to 50 acres had, however, been adhered to.

[55] *Ibid*.
[56] *Ibid*.
[57] *Ibid*.
[58] UPCC Circular Letter No. 41, *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938, p. 287.
[59] *Sangharsh*, 24 October 1938, p. 16.
[60] *Sangharsh*, 1 January 1939, p. 12.
[61] *Sangharsh*, 3 October 1938, p. 16.
[62] *Sangharsh*, 17 October, 1938, p. 8.

Coping with Increased Numbers

In the meantime, the membership of the UP Congress was growing by leaps and bounds. Four-anna primary members had grown from 62,703 in 1936 to 88,620 by September 1937. By early 1938 the figure was 939,340 and by December 1938 it had swelled to 1,450,000.[63] This phenomenon has led Tomlinson to make the rather sweeping statement that, in these years, enrolment of members was the sole activity of lower-level Congress committees.[64] That this was untrue is revealed from the numerous references to the work of Mandal Congress Committees available for this period. In Unnao it was a MCC, which had helped a tenant to re-assert his rights over his land.[65] In Pargana Madaora of Jhansi, the MCC organized a procession of Kisans against a zamindar and withstood the *lathi* attacks of the zamindar's men. These are just two examples: numerous others can be cited to show the involvement of the MCCs especially in the intense agrarian conflict taking place at this time.

No doubt the phenomenal increase in membership posed a major organizational problem. Congress leaders themselves admitted that many opportunists and self-seekers had joined the Congress.[66] Perhaps never before did the organization have to contend with such a large body of apathetic members, indifferent to the long-term nationalist goals of the Congress.

Could the UPCC tackle this problem effectively? The organization had two options available to it: (*a*) to succeed in changing the outlook of those hungry power-seekers and make them selfless, committed nationalists; or (*b*) to restrict further entry by more stringent qualifications and by weeding out the undesirable elements. Both options were availed of, though the latter was more heavily relied upon.[67]

[63] For the 1936 figure, see *AICC*/G-76/1936, p. 117; for 1937 see *AICC*/G-78/1937–38; for the early 1938 figure see *AICC*/G-78/1937–38, p. 1; and for the December 1938 figure, Mahabir Tyagi's statement, *Sangharsh*, 5 December 1938, p. 12.

[64] B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress*, p. 66.

[65] See chapter on the Kisan Sabha.

[66] Editorial in *The National Herald*, 4 December 1938, p. 6.

[67] This option was put to use from late 1938 onwards. As an editorial in *The National Herald*, 17 December 1938, explained: "The Congress is primarily

Though a UPCC circular on 9 January 1938 had advised Congressmen not to meet government servants unless there was some specific need,[68] the former were not able to always resist the temptation.[69] There were charges of embezzlement and misuse of funds against some of the UPCC office-staff.[70] (Ironically, these were members of that same Congress civil service for whom Nehru had such praise!) Delegates' elections,[71] and those to DCCs[72] were marked by several irregularities.

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a fighting organisation. In it there is no place for adventurers and careerists.... It represents the nation on the march and only persons prepared for gruelling discipline have the right to hold the commissioned ranks.... The Working Committee...is not keen on a large and ineffectual membership which is as useless as a mob or a rabble." At the same time the Working Committee at a meeting in Wardha had decided on a "purge" of the primary ranks of the Congress organization. It was also decided to have a register of voters rather than a register of four- anna members. Only those who took the trouble of going personally to the Congress office to register themselves could vote. See J. Nehru's article, "The United Provinces Congress", *The National Herald*, 10–11 January 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 455. Many of the UPCC circulars of 1939 were concerned with the elimination of "bogus members" from the Congress. *AICC*/P-20 KWI/1939, pp. 389–93.

[68] *AICC*/P-20(i)/1937, p. 120.

[69] There were complaints about three Congressmen in Mahoba, Hamirpur District, having attended parties hosted by the SP and SDO. *Sangharsh*, 21 May 1939, p. 28.

[70] The honorary auditor for the UPCC in a letter to Mahatma Gandhi on 2 November 1938 implicated 20 members of the office staff. *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938–39, pp. 147–51. However, K.D. Malaviya in a letter to Gandhi dated 28 November 1938, denied that there was widespread corruption. *Ibid*., pp. 187–88.

[71] From Kanpur it was reported that, during the delegates' election for the Haripura Congress, one of the candidates, who was also a former DCC General Secretary, ensured that "only voters of his choice entered the polling booth". Supporters of the rival candidate were beaten up. Letter from Bakhat Bahadur, Kanpur, to Election Officer, UPCC dated 23 December 1937, *AICC*/P-20(i)/1937, p. 243. M.N. Roy complained of irregularities in the 1939 delegates' election to Tripuri from Dehradun, as a result of which, he claimed, he had been defeated. *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938–39.

[72] For instance, the election to the Benares DCC in April 1938 was not held properly. A large number of the 100 candidates were "disqualified" and a handful selected at a secret meeting. These were duly declared elected. However, election petitions were filed and some of the office-bearers had to resign perforce. *The Leader*, 27 April 1938, p. 14.

Towards the end of 1938 it was felt that this state of affairs must be remedied, especially since the organization had to be streamlined for a possible confrontation with the British Government over the Federation issue.[73] A five-man committee, with Purshottamdas Tandon as the Convenor and consisting of Mohanlal Saksena, Acharya Narendra Dev, Acharya Kripalani and Sri Prakasa, was appointed to bring about some constitutional changes so as to "protect the Congress ideals and programme".[74] The Committee submitted its report on 10 December 1938. It suggested higher qualifications for those contesting elections: a contestant for delegates' election would have had to have spun 5,000 yards of *khadi* or put in 120 hours of work for the Congress (four hours per day for a 30-day period would be adequate). To be elected to any Congress Committee it was necessary to have been a habitually *khadi*-wearing Congress member for at least three years. A nominated member was debarred from campaigning for himself. No printed or handwritten notices in favour of any candidate or in criticism of rival candidates were to be allowed. Another significant recommendation was a ban on any Hindu Mahasabha or Muslim League member from joining the Congress. As for primary members, it was decided that only such members as took the trouble to go personally to the Congress office and register themselves would be allowed to vote.[75]

The Tandon Committee recommendations could go a long way towards streamlining the Congress organization. However, they were inadequate to wipe out the prevalent corruption.[76] For instance, the qualification of having spun 5,000 yards of *khadi* for delegateship acted as no deterrent since any amount of *khadi* could be freely bought and passed off as self-spun.[77]

[73] On 24 October 1938, the president of the UPCC issued a call to be ready to fight the federation by closing the Congress ranks. *The National Herald*, 25 October 1938, p. 4.

[74] *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938, p. 231.

[75] Jawaharlal Nehru, "The U.P. Congress", *The National Herald*, 10–11 January 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 9, pp. 455–56.

[76] M.N. Roy felt that the report had only suggested an "elaborate election machinery", which did not go to the root of the problem. M.N. Roy's letter to the General Secretary, UPCC dated 7 February 1939, *M.N. Roy Papers*, Roll 10.

[77] Many of our interviewees mentioned that some Congressmen resorted to this malpractice.

For turning the new entrants to the Congress into good nationalists, there were, indeed, some excellent schemes in operation. The volunteer training programme and Seva Dal camps were rather effective in this direction, as noted earlier. The UPCC had formed a Volunteer Board and, in October 1938, sanctioned a sum of Rs 1,150 for its use.[78] The literacy campaign was another effort, which involved large numbers.[79] The prohibition drive was, however, limited geographically, covering the districts of Etah and Mainpuri alone.[80] The Rural Development Programme was another successful endeavour, combining the efforts of the Congress government and the UPCC.[81] Such were the "reformist" programmes of the Congress. For those of a more militant disposition, work in the Kisan Sabhas, membership of Youth Leagues, or of underground terrorist groups, or work among labour, was available.

From the list given here, it appears that there was no paucity of schemes to involve new recruits. The schemes were financially sound since many of them were backed by budget allocations from the ministry.[82] The UPCC itself was a richer organization by 1938: all salaried Congressmen were required to contribute 15 per cent of their salaries to the Committee;[83] and there was a vast four-anna membership. Doubtless, the Committee also received substantial sums in the form of voluntary donations from several quarters.

[78] *Sangharsh*, 24 October 1938, p. 16.

[79] *The National Herald*, 17 January 1939, p. 8.

[80] *AICC*/P. L.4/1938, pp. 28, 30, 103, 107. Later, it was extended to Bijnor, Jaunpur, Farrukhabad and Badaun.

[81] The UP Government had formed a 33-man Rural Development Board in April 1938. It consisted of MLAs and MLCs, Congress and non-Congress, as well as government officials. *The Leader*, 22 April 1938, p. 123. Usually the district-level Rural Development Association was headed by a prominent Congressman, for example, Raghubir Sahai in Badaun and R.S. Pandit in Allahabad. Its work ranged from digging of wells, drains and soakage pits to forming libraries and panchayats. *The Leader*, 30 April 1938, p. 14 and 2 May 1938, p. 7. In October 1938 the UPCC decided that through a more widespread development of rural uplift schemes, it would intensify the programme of mass contacts. *The National Herald*, 19 October 1938, p. 6.

[82] In the 1938 Budget, Rs 2 lakh were set aside for the Adult Literacy Campaign, Rs 41.36 lakh was allocated for rural development.

[83] Decision taken at the UPCC EC meeting held on 10 May 1938, *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1938, p. 204.

Consequently, from 1938 onwards, every City and District Congress Committee could afford to employ an Office Secretary on a monthly salary ranging from Rs 15 to Rs 40 per month.[84] The UPCC had also acquired a "Propaganda Motorbus", fitted with a loudspeaker, which toured the districts where meetings were scheduled. Plans were afoot in 1938, to acquire another motorbus of the same kind.[85] All this contrasted sharply with the state of affairs in the first half of 1937, when DCCs could not even hold political conferences on time due to financial constraints.[86]

Muslim Representation in the UP Congress

Yet, one problem which greatly irked the UP Congress organization as well as the G.B. Pant ministry was the rapidly growing communal divide. There was an alarming increase in communal riots in early 1938 and, by 1939, the problem was to assume menacing proportions.

The UPCC had responded to Nehru's suggestion for Muslim mass contact in 1937, and a seven-man Muslim Mass Contact Committee had been constituted at the 12 September meeting of the EC.[87] Damodar Swarup Seth was to be the convenor. Four of the members were Muslims, including Dr Ashraf, the Secretary of the All-India Muslim Mass Contact Committee. Congress Socialists, Acharya Narendra Dev and Balkrishna Sharma, were also members. The tasks of the Committee were not very well defined. It was expected to propagate the Congress ideology and programme among the Muslims. Circulars for the UPCC were simultaneously brought out in Urdu and Hindi. In April 1938, the Committee decided to set up an Urdu Section with an Assistant Secretary who would be paid a starting salary of Rs 60 per month.[88] The work of this section was to keep in touch with "trends of

[84] Ranjit Pandit's handout to all DCCs and CCCs after the Aligarh Political Conference, December 1937, *ibid.*, pp. 197–98.

[85] Circular No. 15 of UPCC, *ibid.*, p. 208.

[86] See Chapter 1 of this book.

[87] *UPCC EC Proceedings*.

[88] UPCC EC Meeting, 24 April 1938, *UPCC EC Proceedings*.

opinion" among Muslims, to deal with Urdu papers and to correct and contradict false statements regarding Congress activities. A sum of Rs 250 per month was also sanctioned to the National Service Board for involving Muslims in the work of the Congress.[89] In the enrolment of primary members too, there was a special focus on Muslim members.

In the delegates' election to the Haripura Congress, the UPCC issued instructions that care should be taken to elect as many Muslims as possible.[90] Yet, there were complaints from at least two districts—Kanpur and Gorakhpur—that Muslim candidates were being opposed.[91] In the elections to subordinate Congress committees as well, there were cases of discrimination. Nehru was asked to intervene in favour of the two Muslim candidates for the Aligarh DCC (which had 50 seats) whose nominations had been rejected by Thakur Malkhan Singh, President of the DCC and an active Socialist, who had allegedly "put up his candidates in opposition!"[92] In our understanding, such cases were not handled with adequate firmness by the UPCC, which tried to persuade the recalcitrant elements, rather than take punitive action. The same was true of communal-minded Congressmen, whose actions were deplored at EC meetings.[93]

However some improvement was noticeable by 1939. Although Muslim candidates for delegates' elections were still not

[89] *Ibid*.

[90] EC meeting of 3 October 1937, *UPCC EC Proceedings*.

[91] In Kanpur, Iqbal Bahadur was opposed by Chhail Behari Dikshit/Kantak, former General Secretary, DCC. In Gorakhpur too, it was alleged by Biswanath Mukerji that the sole Muslim candidate, Abu Zafar Ansari, was being opposed. Letter dated 20 December 1937 to the UPCC president, *AICC*/P-20(i-iii)/1937, pp. 243, 249 respectively.

[92] *AICC*/P-20(ii)/1938, p. 279, letter from Jagdambe Prasad Agarwal, President, Aligarh TCC to Nehru, dated 15 March 1938. See also Zoya Hasan, "Congress in Aligarh District, 1930–1946: Problems of Political Mobilization" in R. Sisson and Stanley Wolpert, eds, *Congress and Indian Nationalism in the Pre-Independence Phase*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 330–51. She shows how Malkhan Singh was even willing to join hands with his arch rival Jwala Prasad Jigyasu to keep out Muhammad Usman and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai from the DCC.

[93] At the EC meeting of 15 January 1938, the involvement of communal-minded Congressman in the Dadri Mela episode was deplored. In the meeting of 24 April 1938, it was the Bareilly Ramlila episode. *UPCC EC Proceedings*.

unanimously elected, discrimination against them by methods such as rejection of nomination papers was not permitted.[94]

While, for 1937, we only have the province-wide figure of Muslim primary members (that is, 3,088 out of 88,620), a detailed, district-wise figure is available for September 1939.[95] These figures are revealing: in Benares, where a large Muslim population resides to this day, there were a mere 248 Muslim members out of a total enrolment of 14,182: Gorakhpur and Lucknow were somewhat better with 783 out of 28,640 and 879 out of 20,990 respectively. Ballia and Azamgarh had 659 out of 21,027 and 647 out of 13,233 respectively. The western UP districts of Meerut, Moradabad, Saharanpur, Bijnor and Bulandshahr had four-figure lists of Muslim primary members. This may be attributed to the Muslim mass contact work in this region.[96]

In October 1938, the PCC declared that it had resolved to "broaden and quicken" its contact with the Muslim masses.[97] The broadening included a decision to do away with the nomenclature "Muslim mass contact". (This decision was taken at the AICC level.[98]) Such committees and departments were declared abolished in early 1939, to be replaced by "a strong Minorities Committee consisting chiefly of leading Muslim Congressmen in the Province as well as some Hindu, Christian and...representatives of the Depressed Classes".[99] Maulana Mian Faruqi was to head the office of this committee in Allahabad.[100] The committee could have done very little work since, by the time it could get off the ground, the ministries had resigned, and the UPCC's priorities had to be reordered. Thus the UPCC's record of Muslim mass contact work

[94] The Secretary, Muslim Mass Contact Committee, Bulandshahar, wrote to Dr Ashraf on 4 January 1939 that initially, papers of two of the three Muslim candidates standing for delegates' election had been rejected. However, on the "timely intervention of Mr Hazari Lal Sharma of the PCC" their papers were accepted. *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938, pp. 323–25.

[95] *AICC*/20/1940, pp. 129–31.

[96] See Chapter 1, for details.

[97] *The National Herald*, 19 October 1938, p. 6.

[98] See letter from J.B. Kripalani to UPCC Secretary, dated 7 February 1939, on the disbanding of Muslim Mass Contact Committees. *AICC*/P-20(i)/1938–39, p. 341.

[99] *The National Herald*, 8 April 1939, p. 5.

[100] Nehru to Rajendra Prasad, 7 July 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 471.

was a mixed one—the greatest failure being the inability to stem the growing tide of the Muslim League in the province.[101]

The Congress–Muslim League divide may have been impossible to bridge, but the gaps between the Kisan Sabha, the PCC and the ministry were not. On returning to India, one of Nehru's first political acts was to attempt such a rapprochement. His presidential address at the UP Political Conference in Ayodhya was a masterly effort to conciliate the three groups. For the benefit of the Kisan Sabha he stated:

> The tenancy legislation is now before the assembly. What has really pained me is that though one and a half years have elapsed, the Congress ministry has not been able to get that legislation passed.... I want that the provincial government should soon enact laws, which would lessen the Kisans' burden of indebtedness.... I certainly have respect for the red flag....[102]

For the pro-Saksena forces in the UPCC he had this to say:

> I understand that efforts are being made to form Kisan Sabhas as organizations rival to the Congress....at the moment it is a great mistake to take out the red flag in villages. The Kisans will get confused seeing several flags...[103]

and as for the Pant ministry:

> I must also deprecate the tendency to resort to hunger strikes or satyagraha by students.... The legislation which is before the assembly has many good provisions....[104]

[101] According to Mushirul Hasan, the Congress right wing had opposed the mass contact programme fearing that "the success of mass contact would further bolster Nehru's image and provide him, as in the case of Gandhi during the Khilafat days, with a solid base among Muslims". Mushirul Hasan, "The Muslim Mass Contact Campaign: An Attempt at Political Mobilization", in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Moblization*, p. 152. Whatever truth there may be in this explanation, it is difficult to imagine that the prestige of Nehru or Gandhi were dependent upon the success of a Muslim mass contact or Khilafat campaign alone.

[102] *SWJN*, Vol. 9, pp. 316–17.

[103] *Ibid*.

[104] *Ibid*.

At the Conference, Nehru allowed strong agrarian resolutions to be placed: for instance, a call was given for the reduction of rents to the tune of Rs 8 crore.[105]

Shortly thereafter, Nehru indulged in what can only be termed an image-building exercise for the UPCC. In a two-part article in *The National Herald* of 10–11 January 1939, he listed the achievements of the UPCC that, in his estimation, compared very favourably with other PCCs. Nehru also maintained, somewhat unrealistically, that the President of the UPCC was no exalted being—he was little more than a member of the EC.[106] In order to revitalize the organization, he appointed R.S. Pandit, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Z.A. Ahmed (who had been shifted out of the AICC office due to differences with J.B. Kripalani) to look after PCC affairs.[107]

Within a short period of time, the new President had succeeded in mollifying critics and applying the salve on bruised feelings. But, in the process, he had carved out a role for himself, which he was called upon to play several times in the ensuing months. It was just as well that Jawaharlal Nehru had a vast reserve of Congress Socialist respect and regard from ministerial quarters to draw upon. A pleasant relationship bound Premier G.B. Pant and Nehru together and when Nehru's ally and protegé, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, took over as acting Premier, things were even smoother. As for the Socialist firebrands like Mohanlal Gautam and Damodar Swarup Seth, Nehru managed to keep them guessing about the position he would take on contentious matters.

Socialists, Kisan Sabha members and labour leaders were greatly agitated by the frequent resort to repressive action by the ministry in mid-1939.[108] This was reflected in a UPCC meeting on 20 May when a series of strongly-worded resolutions against the ministry were proposed. There was also a suggestion that a committee be appointed by the PCC to keep an eye on the functioning of the ministries. As President of the UPCC, Nehru firmly turned down the proposal. As for the other resolutions, he pronounced them to be too critical of the ministry and suggested that an alternative

[105] Haig to Linlithgow, 10 January 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

[106] *SWJN*, Vol. 9, pp. 452–56.

[107] Dr Z.A. Ahmed, *Mere Jiwan ki Kuch Yaden* (in Hindi), Lucknow, 1997, p. 149.

[108] *Sangharsh*, 24 April 1939, p. 19 and 7 May 1939, p. 10.

resolution, to the effect that the time had come for Congress to resign from office, be passed.[109]

On the other hand, when Nehru got news of a controversial circular from the Chief Secretary to district authorities to the effect that punitive action sanctioned against fomentors of communal violence could also be applied to those preaching class hatred, he condemned it and attributed its having been issued to some "Governmental lapse".[110] The UPCC resolution on the disciplinary action taken by the AICC against the 9 July demonstrators must owe itself to Nehru: it stated that while nothing should be done to split the Congress ranks, people should have the freedom to express their views.[111]

Yet, all of Nehru's efforts were inadequate to lessen the growing animosity between the ministry and the PCC. Each was trying to control the other. On 27 December 1938 the UPCC, by a majority, passed a resolution disallowing MLAs from serving on the Congress committees. The resolution was opposed by Nehru, Mohanlal Saksena and Acharya Narendra Dev. It resulted in the UPCC EC resigning en masse. The resignations were later withdrawn when the PCC affirmed its confidence in the EC.[112] Following upon this, the PCC tried to appoint a committee to monitor ministerial functioning, which came to naught. The ministry's rejoinder was an attempt at laying down guidelines for the PCC and a suggestion that PCCs and Congressmen could not pass or accept resolutions contrary to the decisions of the AICC.[113] The Premier's anti-Subhas stand at Tripuri must have added a further dimension to the conflict, since the majority in the PCC was in Subhas Bose's favour.

Indeed, the Congress presidential election for 1939 cast a heavy shadow on politics in the UP with all the major leaders arraying themselves into pro- and anti-Bose camps. But the polarization was not ministry versus the PCCs. Within the Cabinet, G.B. Pant and R.A. Kidwai were in opposite camps, with the latter supporting Bose's candidature.[114] Acharya Narendra Dev too had clearly and

[109] *Sangharsh*, 28 May 1939, p. 3.
[110] *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 349.
[111] *Sangharsh*, 13 August 1939, p. 12.
[112] *Sangharsh*, 1 January 1939, p. 12.
[113] *Sangharsh*, 9 July 1939, p. 9.
[114] Haig to Linlithgow, 8 March 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 1.

openly indicated his preference for Bose.[115] Jawaharlal Nehru had expressed the view that, at this juncture, it was not advisable for Bose to seek re-election and that he would have preferred Maulana Azad who had, however, declined to contest.[116] Here, then, was an issue that cut across all the lines drawn over the preceding two years (to find Kidwai, the Revenue Minister and Mohanlal Gautam, strident critic of the Tenancy Bill, in the same camp was strange indeed!) The majority which the UP gave to Bose is the best proof of the vague uneasiness with Gandhi that has been referred to elsewhere in this volume; as also of the radical orientation of the UP Congress in these years.

Conclusion

What impressions do we get, then, of the UPCC in the UP at the end of this exercise? One thing strikes us immediately: that this Committee was hard put to keep pace with the frenetic activity of Congressmen in the province in this period. Some areas of work (such as panchayat forming) remained outside the UPCC's purview. Others, such as the formation of Seva Dals were first undertaken through local initiative and later brought under the umbrella of the UPCC.[117] The Committee reflected all the dominant and conflicting trends in the UP Congress at this time. While it could take a firm stand on communal matters, it was never able to effectively resolve the Kisan Sabha–Congress conflict, which was played out several times within its premises.

It is difficult to measure the extent of Socialist influence over the UPCC by 1939. Clearly, the total identification of CSP and UPCC programmes of the 1936–37 period was missing in the later years. By 1938, CSP and UPCC policy could be told apart. However, the somewhat critical attitude of the CSP towards the PCC leadership in 1938 disappeared by 1939, thanks to Nehru's efforts. Hence, it would not be correct to maintain that the Congress Socialists lost their influence over the UPCC by 1939; indeed, the Committee

[115] *Sangharsh*, 29 January 1939.

[116] Statement to the Press on "The Congress Presidential Election", Almora, 26 January 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 9, pp. 477–79.

[117] See the fourth section of Chapter 3.

still enjoyed the confidence of the Socialists very substantially. Nor were non-Socialist elements able to make much headway in the organization. If they had their pockets of influence, those were residual from the pre-1935 organizational set-up. In 1940, the UP was regarded as one of the few remaining strong-holds of the CSP.[118]

Though there were tensions between the Pant ministry and the UPCC, there was no rift. This was largely due to the large number of individuals who played active roles in both fora. Despite the heavy legislative schedule, ministers, parliamentary secretaries and other MLAs found plenty of time for Congress organizational work. At every district political conference in the 1937–39 period, one and usually more such figures could be found in attendance. Legislators like Mohanlal Gautam, B.D. Tripathi, Algu Rai Shastri and even Pant himself were indispensable to the Congress movement outside the Council Chambers. District-level leaders-cum-legislators spearheaded work like Seva Dal training in their districts. Some were also much-respected peasant activists.

As for the query: did a new level of Congress leadership emerge at the district level in these years, the answer is a distinct yes. Whether it was the ex-revolutionary terrorists who assumed responsible positions in the Congress, or the young England-returned Communists—Z.A. Ahmed, Sajjad Zaheer (who was active in Allahabad DCC affairs by 1939) and K.M. Ashraf—or the young protegés of older Congressmen (for instance, Mohanlal Gautam was considered a disciple of P.D. Tandon), the UPCC of the late 1930s certainly had a changed character.

[118] Results of Congress elections, 1940, *Home Poll.*, 4/4/40, p. 2.

SEVEN

Congress and the War: A Return to Gandhi?

On 3 September 1939, the long anticipated war in Europe finally broke out. The shadow of this war had loomed large over the world for several years. In India, the nationalists had, since 1936, been declaring from public platforms and at meetings that they would not support Britain in a second European war.[1] The reason was simple: India's support to Britain in the First World War I had only fetched her the Rowlatt Act and Jallianwala Bagh.[2]

The commencement of the war nevertheless found the Congress divided on the question. Gandhi was openly sympathetic to Britain's plight in the war and was even willing to offer moral support.

[1] At the Lucknow session of the Congress in April 1936, the "War Danger" resolution warned against India being made a tool in an imperialist war and declared the opposition of the Congress to participation in any Imperialist War. A.M. Zaidi and S.G. Zaidi, eds, *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress* (henceforth *The Encyclopaedia of the INC)*, Vol. 11, New Delhi, 1980, p. 116.

At Faizpur, the War Danger resolution stated: "No credits must be voted for such a war and voluntary subscriptions and war loans must not be supported and all other war preparations resisted". *Ibid.*, p. 204.

At Haripura, in February 1938 the resolution titled Foreign Policy and "War Danger" had deplored England's attempts to arrive at an arrangement with Nazi Germany. It also expressed determination to resist any attempt to involve India in a war. *Ibid.*, pp. 427–28.

[2] For an example of this position see Purshottamdas Tandon's speeches in Etawah in January 1940, *PAI UP*, No. 5/1940, 20–27 January, p. 21.

The Left forces did not want India to participate in this "imperialist war". They felt that the Congress should press for independence by launching a Civil Disobedience Movement. Jawaharlal Nehru's stand was an attempt to reconcile these divergent points of view. At the Working Committee meeting in Wardha on 14 September 1939 he proposed a resolution, the main features of which were that: (*a*) Britain must define her objectives in this war; and (*b*) if she was fighting Germany in order to save democracy, she must grant complete independence to India. The policies of the British Government then prevailing in India, and the repressive measures which had already been unleashed, were condemned as being contrary to the spirit of democracy. Doubtless, India's sympathies were with Britain in her attempt to defeat fascism. But only an independent India would lend her support to Britain.[3]

This draft resolution evoked mixed reactions amongst the Working Committee members. The majority, including Maulana Azad, agreed with the text of the resolution. But Gandhi and his followers were unhappy at the possibility of India veering away from the path of non-violence. For, if Britain were to accede to the Congress demands, there was a distinct possibility of India joining the Allied war effort—and this would go against the principle of non-violence.[4] Members of the Left, that is, Subhas Bose, Acharya Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash Narayan had also been invited to this session to express their views. Bose was of the view that England would not respond to any suggestions from the Congress about the principle of democracy. This led to a heated exchange with Nehru who maintained that the Congress had to act in a dignified manner.[5] However, Nehru was allowed to have the last word at this Working Committee meeting. His resolution was passed with few changes. Despite their differences, Gandhi seemed anxious to give the platform to Jawaharlal Nehru. He apparently even suggested that Nehru should become President of the Congress in place of Rajendra Prasad. Technicalities prevented this suggestion from being carried through, however.[6] Nevertheless a three-

[3] *SWJN*, Vol. 10, pp. 122–38.

[4] See letters from Shankarrao Deo and J.B. Kripalani to Rajendra Prasad, 13 and 12 October respectively. Valmiki Choudhary, ed., *Rajendra Prasad Correspondence and Select Documents*, Vol. 4, New Delhi, 1984, p. 130.

[5] *The Pioneer*, 14 September 1939, p. 13.

[6] Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, 1935–47, p. 130.

member War Sub-Committee was formed with Maulana Azad, Vallabhbhai Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru as its members.[7] Clearly, the initiative was in the hands of those who advocated a tough line vis-à-vis the British Government.

How, then, do we account for Gandhi's emotional reaction at the outset of the war: "I could not contemplate without being stirred to the very depth, the destruction of London...?"[8] Indeed, this reaction even seemed to be a betrayal of India's cause. But, as Gandhi himself explained to a correspondent, this display of sympathy for the adversary was part of his strategy: "A satyagrahi loves his so-called enemy even as his friend. As a satyagrahi, i.e., votary of ahimsa, I must wish well to England."[9] By thus disarming his opponent, he wished to secure a psychological advantage. Moreover, it must also be remembered that Gandhi was only offering emotional support—there was no question of giving material help to the war effort.

By expressing sympathy with Britain's cause, Congress got a hearing from certain progressive sections of British public opinion. Labour leaders like Attlee, Wedgewood Benn and Stafford Cripps agreed with the Congress that the time had come for Britain to make very substantial concessions to India.[10] Newspapers like the *Manchester Guardian* also urged the Chamberlain Government to be more open to change.[11] Though all these suggestions had little effect on the authorities, Congress was assured of a powerful pressure lobby within Britain.

[7] *Ibid*., pp. 130–31.

[8] Gandhi's Statement after his first interview with the Viceroy, *CWMG*, Vol. 70, p. 162.

[9] *CWMG*, Vol. 70, p. 170.

[10] "Attlee has evidently been spoon-fed by the Congress and I suspect through the agency of Krishna Menon and he took a purely Congress view of the problem." Zetland to Linlithgow, 11 October 1939, *Linlithgow Papers*, Mss. Eur. F.125/8, p. 104. In a letter on 16 October 1939 Nehru informed Rajendra Prasad, Gandhi and Patel: "I have been receiving some news from England...I gather from all these that our statement and resolution have created some stir in political and journalistic circles in London." *SWJN*, Vol. 10, p. 189.

See also Stafford Cripps' letter to Nehru, 11 October 1939, *JN Papers*, Vol. 14, pp. 97–100.

[11] Zetland to Linlithgow, 16 October 1939, *Linlithgow Papers*, F.125/8. Harold Laski had also been critical of the government and sympathetic to Gandhi in the *Manchester Guardian*. As reported in *The Pioneer*, 24 October 1939, p. 16.

In India, however, the Congress resolution was viewed with suspicion by the radicals. Members of the CSP, the Communist Party and the Forward Bloc unanimously believed that the time had come to launch an all-out offensive against the imperialist regime.[12] They were the earliest champions of non-participation in the war effort and when the war clouds hung heavy over the horizon in August 1939, they had abandoned all their routine activities to concentrate wholly on anti-war propaganda, as will be seen later in this chapter.

Different Left groups reacted differently to the Working Committee resolution. A prominent member of the Forward Bloc lamented that "the Working Committee has not given any clarion call for general mobilization of the people with a view to initiate any struggle if the British reply is not satisfactory".[13] From the CSP camp, Jayaprakash Narayan felt that there was no need for the Congress to wait and see what Britain was going to say. This was an imperialist war and any help given by India would only strengthen imperialism.[14] The Communists warned that "compromise on the issue of the war is the biggest danger that faces the national movement". According to them, the Gandhian leadership "had entered into its last and most reactionary phase".[15] Despite these differences there was a general belief that the Congress was capable of reacting correctly "at the right psychological moments".[16] Given this faith in Congress potential, the Left decided not to take any hasty step. Since the Congress had not ruled out the possibility of future mass action, it was considered unwise to openly criticize the Congress at this juncture.[17] All action was held

[12] The Communists saw in the war a revolutionary situation for India and hence believed that a massive anti-British offensive must soon be launched. "CPI Policy Statement on Tactics during Imperialist Phase of War", *JA* 1940/48. As for the Forward Bloc position see Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle 1920–42*, pp. 340–41.

[13] Indulal Yagnik to Sahajanand, 21 September 1939, *Indulal Yagnik Papers* (henceforth *IY Papers*), S. File 11, p. 185.

[14] *The National Herald*, 10 October 1939, p. 11.

[15] A.K. Ghosh, "CSP and the War from Socialism to Gandhism", *JA*, 1940/46.

[16] *Ibid*.

[17] Sahajanand's statement at Anti-Imperialist Conference and Rally, 4 October 1939. *IY Papers*, S.File 11, p. 173. The Communists also believed in this position.

in abeyance until the AICC session of the Congress, which was scheduled to meet on 8 and 9 October to endorse the Working Committee resolution.

The loose confederation of Left parties under the Left Consolidation Committee[18] planned to hold an Anti-Imperialist Conference at Nagpur simultaneously with the AICC session. However, as time drew near, only Forward Bloc members and the Communists seemed enthusiastic about it. Sahajanand was anxious that the Conference not be seen as opposed to the official Congress: the idea was to "simply strengthen its (Congress's) hands in taking opportune decisions at this most critical juncture.[19] Ultimately the Conference, which was a low key affair, did appear as a challenge to the AICC.[20] It was mainly attended by Forward Bloc members, members of the Kisan Sabha and a few Communists. The CSP denied having participated in the Anti-Imperialist Conference.[21] Despite this deflection of energies, the Left parties did make their presence felt at the AICC session at Wardha on 8 and 9 October. There was, however, a slight difference in the tone of the new Congress resolution that was drawn up here. Some of the toughness of the earlier statement had been whittled down and the Congress seemed eager to give "every opportunity for the war and peace aims of the British Government to be clarified".[22] As many as 23 amendments were put forward to this draft resolution.[23] While most of these were either lost or withdrawn, the amendment proposed by Jayaprakash Narayan was considered more seriously. This amendment desired the Congress to "refuse to entertain a settlement on the issue of freedom which pledged in advance the country's support to this war".[24] Yet, this resolution too was

[18] For details on the origins of the Left Consolidation Committee and its activities prior to October, see Chapter 4.

[19] Sahajanand to Yagnik, 25 September 1939, *IY Papers*, Subject File 11, p. 179.

[20] Sahajanand's statement on Anti-Imperialist Conference and Rally, *ibid.*

[21] *The Pioneer*, 11 October 1939, p. 4.

[22] A.M. Zaidi and S.G. Zaidi, eds, *The Encyclopaedia of the INC*, Vol. 12, p. 172.

[23] *The Pioneer*, 10 October 1939, p. 8.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 9. See also Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to Krishna Menon dated 16 October 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 10, p. 182.

defeated by 181 votes to 64.[25] The original draft resolution was carried by a majority of 188 votes to 58.[26]

Quite understandably the Leftists were displeased with this delay in going on the path of conflict. The Forward Bloc had threatened to disregard the AICC decision and to go ahead with their programme.[27] Jawaharlal Nehru was rather sensitive to such developments at the AICC session. In a letter to V.K. Krishna Menon in London he noted: "Please realize the depth of feeling here against any co-operation in the war." He further added, "The forces against it (a compromise) are too strong."[28]

Differences between Gandhi and other members of the Working Committee erupted once again on the issue of non-violence. Gandhi felt that an independent India could not build up an armed strength, since that would be contrary to the spirit of non-violence.[29] Since the other members thought that this was an unrealistic position, Gandhi lamented that he was out of tune with the Congress—that perhaps someone else should assume the reins of leadership.[30]

It was into this atmosphere of uncertainty that the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, stepped in with his characteristic tactlessness. (To blame the Viceroy wholly would, however, be unfair. The onus was mainly on the Home government.) His speech of 17 October left no doubt in anyone's mind about the rigidity of the British position at this moment of crisis.[31] There was to be no constitutional advance—yes, perhaps the 1935 Act could be revised at the end of the war. The Viceroy considered it more important that all sections of Indian opinion should arrive at a consensus. The wishes of the minorities must be fully respected. Finally, in order to associate "Indian public opinion" with the war effort, he proposed the setting up of a consultative group "representative of all the major political

[25] *The Pioneer*, 11 October 1939, p. 4.

[26] Nehru to Krishna Menon dated 16 October 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 10, p. 182.

[27] *Ibid*.

[28] *Ibid*.

[29] Gandhi recounted these differences in the course of an interview with the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, on 5 October 1939, *Linlithgow Papers*, F.125/8, p. 169.

[30] Gandhi's letter to Nehru, 26 October 1939, *CWMG*, Vol. 70, p. 297.

[31] Statement by H.E. the Viceroy, issued on 18 October 1939, *Speeches by the Marquess of Linlithgow*, Vol. 2, pp. 143–55.

parties in British India and of the Indian Princes".[32] This consultative group was to have a floating membership and would be consulted by the Viceroy on defence matters if he so wished; the Committee would occasionally be given tidbits of war information as well.[33]

The Ministries Resign

The effect of this speech on the Congress was instantaneous. Mahatma Gandhi, for the first time in this situation, adopted a critical tone: "The Congress has asked for bread and it has got stone. The old policy of divide and rule is to continue",[34] he observed. The Working Committee meeting at Wardha on 22 and 23 October unanimously resolved not to give any support to Great Britain and, as a first step in this direction, called upon the Congress ministries to tender their resignations.[35] Observers noted that there was complete agreement and a visible sense of relief amongst the members when this resolution was passed.[36] The only note of restraint was the warning to Congressmen not to indulge in any "hasty action in the shape of civil disobedience, political strikes and the like".[37]

Our narrative until this point suggests that there was a popular wave in favour of the resignation of the ministries. Gandhi himself had observed that, en route to Simla to meet the Viceroy, he was met by crowds in Delhi who seemed to tell him that no compromise should be made.[38] The people seemed to be in a militant mood.

Historians and contemporary observers have explained the Congress decision to resign from office in different ways. A popular interpretation was that things were going badly for the ministries, left-wing pressure and discontent were mounting and the

[32] For details see the telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of state dated 28 September 1939, *Zetland Papers*, Roll 9.

[33] *Ibid*.

[34] Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, p. 139.

[35] *SWJN*, Vol. 10, p. 206.

[36] *The Pioneer*, 24 October 1939, p. 5.

[37] *Ibid*.

[38] Statement to the Press, 5 September 1939, *CWMG*, Vol. 70, p. 161.

resignations were a face-saving device.[39] No doubt there is enough evidence to prove that the ministries were having a tough time—in the UP, the Khaksars, the labour force in Kanpur and students were threatening the peace of the province.[40] But the UP Governor did not seem to think that the ministries would resign just yet—several legislative measures were yet to be finalized and the Governor's assent to the Tenancy Bill was still to be obtained.[41]

Manmath Nath Gupta, a revolutionary terrorist of repute, based in the UP observed:

> ...it was apparent on the very first day of the war that the English Governors would grab more and more real power. Thus the Congress ministries were almost hustled to send in their resignations.[42]

British journalists have offered other explanations. For instance, Guy Wint and George Schuster in their book *India and Democracy* have suggested that the Congress would have lost the support of the people if it had not resigned; and "since Congress leaders in general are no less nervous about their following than are, say, film-stars", the Congress High Command did not dare to take a moderate line. "Rival claimants would have stolen their thunder."[43] What is lacking in the explanation (besides its obvious frivolity) is an understanding of the British attitude at this juncture, which virtually drove the Congress to resignation.

Gandhi justified the decision to resign with the following words:

> I am quite clear in my mind that what has happened is the best for the cause. It is a bitter pill. I know. But it was needed. It will drive away all the parasites from the body. We would have been obliged to do wrong things which we shall be able to avoid. We shall come to power with added strength.[44]

[39] Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885–1947*, p. 375.
[40] Haig to Linlithgow, 18 October 1939, *Haig Papers*, Roll 2.
[41] *Ibid*.
[42] Manmath Nath Gupta, *They Lived Dangerously*, New Delhi, 1969, p. 395.
[43] Wint and Schuster, *India and Democracy*, London, 1941, p. 160.
[44] Seogaon, 23 October 1939, *CWMG*, Vol. 70, p. 291.

Indeed, Gandhi's main concern in the following months was to be the "cleansing" of the Congress, as indicated here.

When the resignations actually came into effect, Jawaharlal Nehru observed in a *National Herald* editorial titled "The Congress Leaves Office":

> It was a moving sight to see some of the ministers bidding farewell to their office staff. Many of them were in tears and even the humble *chaprasis* wept as if something they had valued greatly was going out of their lives.[45]

But there was little time for sentimentality in the Congress. The question of "what next" loomed large in every Congressman's mind. There was, quite logically, an expectation that the resignations would ultimately be followed up by a mass movement. In eastern, central and western UP preparations were already afoot with many local-level Congress committees converting themselves into "war councils" to propagate secret anti-war propaganda.[46] In Allahabad, the Youth League was busy writing anti-war slogans on the walls and wagons of railway yards.[47] In some districts, the process of transferring records of the Congress offices to secret places to prevent their seizure by the authorities had already begun.[48] In Benares, a secret courier system had also been established.[49] The Kanpur Congress had even put out a secret circular asking the city, district, ward and mandal war councils to contribute Rs 8 each towards a "Provincial Emergency Fund". The circular went on to claim that Acharya Narendra Dev had been appointed as the first dictator of the province.[50]

[45] *SWJN*, Vol. 10, p. 217.

[46] *PAI UP*, No. 43/1939, 14–21 October, p. 276 for Benares, Ghazipur and Mainpuri, *PAI UP*, No. 44/1939, 21–28 October for Farrukhabad, Lucknow, Mathura and Allahabad; *PAI UP*, Nos 45, 46 for Ballia, Bareilly, Fatehpur, Jhansi, Sultanpur, Sitapur, Mirzapur, Gorakhpur, Meerut and Bulandshahar; *PAI UP*, No. 47/1939, 11–18 November, p. 292 for Hamirpur and Muzaffarnagar. The Dehradun District War Council was formed later, *PAI UP*, No. 49/1939, 25 November–2 December, p. 300.

[47] Manmath Nath Gupta, *They Lived Dangerously*, p. 401.

[48] This happened in Farrukhabad, for instance. *PAI UP*, No. 46/1939, 4–11 November, p. 288.

[49] *PAI UP*, No. 47/1939, 11–18 November, p. 292.

[50] *PAI UP*, No. 48/1939, 18–25 November, p. 296.

At another level, more extreme forms of resistance were being advocated. Local leaders of the Forward Bloc, most prominently Bishambhar Dayal Tripathi of Unnao, proposed acts of sabotage and attacks on police stations by Congressmen. In every one of his numerous speeches at this time, Tripathi emphasized the fact that there were so few policemen in each *thana* that they could be easily overpowered by the villagers.[51] These actions, in Tripathi's estimation, would hasten the impending downfall of the Raj. Anti-police rhetoric was also popular in Azamgarh and Aligarh.[52] In early November, J.B. Kripalani reported to Mahatma Gandhi that in the UP "anonymous placards had been circulated asking people to cut wires and tear up rails".[53]

Gandhi described these activities as people taking the law into their own hands.[54] Not only did these acts go against the principle of non-violence but they were also totally at variance with his proposed plan of action for the Congress. On 28 October 1939, Gandhi wrote in the *Harijan*:

> So far as I can see there is no possibility of civil resistance on a large scale unless Congressmen show perfect discipline and greater appreciation than hitherto of non-violence and truth. There need be none unless we are goaded into it by the authorities.[55]

A few days later, on 4 November 1939, he spelt out his reservations on civil disobedience more explicitly:

> Apart from the uncertainty of the observance of non-violence in Congress ranks is the tremendous fact that the Muslim League looks upon the Congress as the enemy of the Muslims. This makes it well-nigh impossible for the Congress to organize successful non-violent revolution through civil disobedience. It will certainly mean Hindu-Muslim riots.[56]

[51] *UP Police File* 211/1939.

[52] *Ibid*.

[53] *PAI UP*, No. 40/1939, 23–30 September, p. 256.

[54] Gandhi's letter to Jawaharlal Nehru dated 4 November 1939, *CWMG*, Vol. 70, pp. 291–93.

[55] *CWMG*, Vol. 70, pp. 291–93.

[56] *CWMG*, Vol. 70, pp. 315–16.

Gandhi's words were prophetic. Within three months the Muslim League had formulated the Pakistan demand at its Working Committee meeting on 3 February 1940. The All-India Muslim League at its Lahore session from 22–24 March 1940 adopted a resolution to the effect that it wanted the entire 1935 Act to be reconsidered *de novo* and any new constitutional plan should be on the basis of recognizing autonomous and sovereign states in the Muslim majority areas of north-western and eastern India.[57]

But to return to Gandhi's statement of 4 November 1939: his words would have dampened the spirits of many a Congressman. Even Jawaharlal Nehru described them as "unfortunate".[58] In a province like the UP, where the link with Gandhi was in any case a tenuous one, this created a peculiar dilemma.[59] There was no question of rejecting Gandhi or his leadership—in fact, his advice was eagerly sought once the ministries had resigned and the possibility of a confrontation with the British opened up. A UPCC meeting in November 1939 had passed a resolution placing full faith in Gandhi's leadership.[60] (The appeal of Subhas Bose had greatly dwindled.) But this faith had been reposed in the expectation that Gandhi would give the call for a mass movement, which, in their understanding, was imperative at this juncture. Gandhi on his part seemed least inclined to do so. Where would that leave the Congressmen of the UP? Would they ignore Gandhi and act on their own convictions? Or would they swallow their convictions and try to fall in line with the Mahatma? From the account given next it will be clear that the latter path was adopted.

[57] For text of the Pakistan resolution see A.M. Zaidi, ed., *Evolution of Muslim Political Thought in India*, Vol. 5, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 215–19.

[58] In a letter to Rajendra Prasad, 11 November 1939, *SWJN*, Vol. 10, p. 477.

[59] The UP had never been a Gandhian province in the manner of Madras or Gujarat. There was no counterpart of a C. Rajagopalachari or a Vallabhbhai Patel or a Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan among Congressmen in the UP. The attitude of Jawaharlal Nehru towards Gandhi symbolized that of most Congressmen in the UP—acceptance of Gandhi's leadership and methods, but no great enthusiasm for the *charkha* and *ahimsa*, even some impatience with it.

[60] *SWJN*, Vol. 10, p. 474.

Gandhi's Meeting with UP Congressmen

In November 1939, Congressmen in the UP had their first opportunity in many years to enter into a dialogue with Gandhi on these issues. The meeting was arranged by Jawaharlal Nehru on the occasion of Gandhi's visit to the province for a Working Committee meeting.[61] The meeting began with a query from the Congressmen of the UP: "Should we not strike while the iron is hot?" Gandhi replied that, for him, preparedness meant willingness to respond to the commander's call at any moment and at any place. This preparedness would only come from regular spinning. Gandhi even suggested that when the army was fully prepared there would be no need to fight at all! Gandhi's interlocutors then asked what would be the minimum period of spinning required to start a movement. Gandhi's response was: "Is it necessary that we should start a movement in just three or six months? It could take six years. What is necessary is that we should be fully prepared."[62] The participants in this dialogue seemed to be at two different levels of understanding altogether! Gandhi's insistence on *charkha* spinning was unrelenting; he recommended that this activity be taken up seriously by the several lakhs who constituted the UP Congress membership. It would have the additional effect of driving out mill-made cloth from the province. Having made the point, Gandhi, the tactical democrat, then expressed his willingness to go along with any programme of *satyagraha* that his interlocutors could devise, provided he was convinced of its viability. Finally, on the question of Hindu-Muslim Unity he appeared more optimistic—he was confident that the Muslims would come around and ultimately not pose a threat to the nationalist campaign.[63]

Whether Gandhi managed to convert the Congressmen of the UP to his views or not, the PCC had resolved to pay more attention

[61] Nehru's note to Gandhi of 8 November 1939 inviting him to meet the prominent workers of UP, *SWJN*, Vol. 10, p. 475.

[62] Abstract of discussion between Gandhi and Congressmen of the UP from Congress Bulletin No. 7 dated 15 December 1939, UPCC Papers, *AICC* File 20/1940, pp. 165–70.

[63] *Ibid*.

to *charkha* spinning. In December itself arrangements were made to start *charkha* centres in all the Congress *mandals* of Allahabad district.[64] A UPCC circular of 15 January 1940 announced the setting up of a temporary five-man committee under the convenorship of R.S. Pandit to deal with the spinning and weaving of *khaddar*.[65]

At the level of popular rhetoric too, there was a noticeable change. By the end of 1939 most Congressmen in the province had accepted the need for unity and discipline in Congress ranks and become more guarded in their speeches.[66] However, the idea that independence could never be attained by spinning *charkha* continued to be freely aired at Forward Bloc and Youth League meetings in Allahabad.[67] There is also evidence of pamphleteering against the Gandhian leadership in the western parts of the province.[68]

In fact, it was not easy to convince Congressmen of the province to take the amended Independence Day pledge of 1940 with the *charkha* clause. This clause, which had been inserted into the original 1930 pledge at a Working Committee meeting in December 1939 stated: "Charkha and Khadi are an integral part of the constructive programme...we shall, therefore, spin regularly, use for our personal requirements nothing but Khadi and so far as possible products of village handicrafts only and endeavour to make others do likewise."[69] Congress directives were that official organs, that is, Congress committees, *must* take the pledge at meetings. Others taking the pledge individually could omit the clause.[70] Subhas Bose advised his followers to categorically reject the new clause, though at the same time warning them not to create any confrontation

[64] *PAI UP*, No. 50/1939, 2–9 December, p. 306.

[65] UPCC Circular No. 139, *AICC*/20/1940, pp. 317–19.

[66] *PAI UP*, No. 2/1940, 31 December–6 January, p. 5.

[67] *PAI UP*, No. 1/1940, for week ending 31 December, pp. 1, 4.

[68] One such pamphlet from Etawah by Aditya Kumar Vajpayee titled "Krantikari Hitler" dated 1 January 1940 declared that the country at present had no need for empty idealism and emphasis on principles. *Proscribed Literature, Chicago University*, Reel 12, No. 14.4.

[69] For text of the new pledge see B.N. Pande, ed., *A Centenary History*, Vol. 3, pp. 306–7.

[70] UPCC Circular No. 140, 15 January 1940, *AICC*/20/1940, pp. 311–15.

with the official Congress committees over this issue.[71] M.N. Roy's League of Radical Congressmen came out with a pamphlet "Congress *ko khatre se bachao*" in criticism of the *charkha* clause.[72] The Socialists and Communists decided to take the pledge in its 1930 form.[73] And when it came to the actual day itself, it was reported that in places like Allahabad, Agra and Mathura many had refused to repeat the *charkha* clause or had taken the pledge in its 1930 form.[74] On the other hand, the directive that there should be no strikes in colleges or factories on 26 January[75] was flouted with many students managing to get their institutions closed for the day.[76]

Indeed, students of the province were rather active politically in this period. Around the time that the resignation of ministries took place, district-level representatives of the Students Federation had met in Lucknow to discuss what action they should take to "end Imperialism in India".[77] Despite evidence of the entry of communal feelings into the student movement by this time,[78] students were the most enthusiastic section of society to participate in the Independence Day celebrations of 1940.[79]

Reviving the Volunteer Movement

Since spinning the *charkha* per se was not going down too well with the UP Congressmen at this time, it was found to be more worthwhile to concentrate on the Qaumi Seva Dal or volunteer movement. At the beginning of the war this movement had already acquired a new meaning—enrolment in the Seva Dals could be projected as the nationalist alternative to enlistment in the British

[71] B.N. Pande, ed., *A Centenary History*, Vol. 3, p. 309.

[72] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1940, 13–20 January, p. 18.

[73] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1940, 13–20 January, p. 16.

[74] *PAI UP*, No. 5/1940, 20–27 January, pp. 21–23.

[75] Gandhi in the *Harijan*, 20 January 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 71, p. 114.

[76] *PAI UP*, No. 5/1940, 20–27 January, p. 26.

[77] *PAI UP*, No. 45/1939, 28 October–4 November, p. 285.

[78] Both in Allahabad and Lucknow universities Muslim students were reported to be objecting to the flying of the Congress flag on university buildings. *PAI UP*, No. 49/1939, 25 November–2 December, p. 302.

[79] *PAI UP*, No. 5/1940, 20–27 January, p. 26.

army to fight the World War II.[80] Even leaders of the Left such as Z.A. Ahmed and ex-revolutionary terrorists like Jogesh Chatterji and B.N. Sanyal, besides Subhas Bose, now showed enthusiasm for the movement.[81] In Kanpur there was even talk of forming a secret volunteer corps of *mazdoors* (workers) and Kisans to fight in the coming struggle.[82] But quite apart from all this, the UPCC itself paid greater attention to the volunteer programme in November and December 1939. A camp was held in Lucknow in November 1939 to train captains for volunteer work in the various districts.[83] This was followed by a meeting of the volunteer board in Mathura where it was decided that the work of volunteering must be speeded up. This involved enrolment of new recruits to the volunteer movement and explaining to them the Congress programme with special emphasis on *ahimsa*.[84] Rallies by volunteers, first at the *mandal* and *tahsil* levels, followed by the district level, were recommended. Response to this programme was greater in western and central UP especially Bulandshahr, Dehradun, Hamirpur, Jhansi, Aligarh, Kumaun, Mainpuri, Muzaffarnagar, Rae Bareli, Unnao, Sitapur, Allahabad, Hardoi and Moradabad than in eastern UP, where Gorakhpur (under Shibbanlal Saksena), Azamgarh, Ballia and Jaunpur were the only districts involved.[85] A further dimension to volunteer activity, especially in some of the more remote eastern districts of the province, was the use of volunteer camps and meetings for under-cover revolutionary activities. For instance, many of the organizers of the Khalispur train dacoity, which took place on 9 July 1940 on the Benares–Jaunpur border, had participated in Qaumi Seva Dal camps in Shahgunj, Jaunpur, in February and early July 1940.[86]

[80] See speeches to this effect in Azamgarh and Sultanpur districts in January 1940. *PAI UP*, No. 3/1940, 6–13 January, p. 11; *PAI UP*, No. 4/1940, 13–20 January, p. 15.

[81] *PAI UP*, No. 41/1939, 7–14 October, p. 267 and *PAI UP*, No. 42/1939, 14–21 October, p. 273 for Bose's involvement with Lucknow Seva Dal activities.

[82] *PAI UP*, No. 45/1939, 28 October–4 November, p. 285.

[83] Report of Congress Qaumi Seva Dal for November 1939, UPCC Papers, *AICC*/20/1940, p. 170.

[84] *Ibid*. Also see Circular No. 12 of Congress Qaumi Seva Dal, 12 December 1939, pp. 181–83.

[85] *PAI UP*, No. 51/1939, 9–16 December, p. 314 and No. 1/1940, 24–31 December 1939, p. 4.

[86] *UPSA CID File* RR Nos 5 and 6.

By February–March 1940, however, there seemed to be a lull in the volunteer movement. Perhaps the preoccupation of most Congressmen with the Ramgarh session of the Congress affected this activity, which was only to revive around the time of the 8 August offer of Lord Linlithgow.

In the meantime, elections to the UPCC had been held in February 1940. Sri Krishna Dutt Paliwal had been elected President, defeating Congress Socialist Damodar Swarup Seth by 212 votes to 174.[87] A rural development organizer and Agra-based editor of the *Sainik*, Paliwal had a reputation of being more right of centre. Keshav Dev Malaviya and Balkrishna Sharma were elected as general secretaries.[88] Elections to subordinate Congress committees had been suspended in December 1939 until further notice.[89] In April 1940, it was decided to continue without elections for 1940 as well.[90]

The Ramgarh Session of the Congress

The Ramgarh session marked a turning point in the career of the Congress. To a large extent the mood at this session was determined by the breakdown of the Gandhi–Linlithgow talks in early February 1940 over Linlithgow's refusal to go beyond his previous offer of 17 October.[91] The only resolution put forward at Ramgarh had already been drafted at the Patna session of the Working Committee (28 February–1 March). It referred to the necessity of civil disobedience, to which the Congress would unhesitatingly resort as soon as the Congress organization was considered fit enough for the purpose.[92] This resolution was passed by a clear majority with only 16 being opposed to it.[93] The passing of the resolution posed no problems, but there were apparently many hurdles to be crossed yet.

[87] *AICC*/G-65/1940, p. 1. Also *PAI UP*, No. 8/1940, 10–17 Feb., p. 40.
[88] *Ibid*.
[89] UPCC Circular of 8 December 1939, *AICC*/P-20/1940, p. 181.
[90] UPCC Circular of 2 April 1940, *AICC*/G-5 (Part-I)/1940, p. 416.
[91] See Gandhi's statement to the Press after interview with Viceroy, 6 February 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 71, p. 188.
[92] A.M. Zaidi and S.G. Zaidi, eds, *The Encyclopaedia of the INC*, Vol. 12, p. 368.
[93] *The National Herald*, 23 March 1940, p. 6.

Gandhi, who addressed the Subjects Committee of the Ramgarh session after a gap of four years, explained that though on previous occasions he had launched a movement without all the conditions that he had laid down being fulfilled, this occasion was different. The Congress was now faced with a far more difficult situation—there was an internal as well as an external crisis. While on the one hand, there was indiscipline, factionalism and lack of faith in non-violence within the Congress, there was, on the other hand, a more determined adversary to contend with—Britain in the midst of war would be at its most repressive. Only the most dedicated Congressmen would be able to meet this challenge. This was to be done through the conversion of all Congress committees into *Satyagraha* Committees.[94] In these committees Gandhi's "word...[was] law" and therefore there was no question of democracy now. While it was compulsory for Congress committees at all levels to convert themselves into "units of satyagraha", members of these committees had the option to enrol as *satyagrahis* or to resign from the committees.

The message was clear—only those who believed in the basic tenets of *satyagraha* would now find a place in the Congress. Gandhi did, however, make a distinction between "active" and "passive" *satyagrahis*. Unlike the former, the latter would not be required to sign a pledge, spin or go to jail, but they would be supporters of all such activities.[95]

This set of instructions from Gandhi were to cause major ripples in the Congress organization, as will be seen shortly. What was Gandhi trying to achieve by these elaborate exercises? At one level he was trying to gauge the commitment of Congress members to the principle of non-violence. At another, he wished to purge the Congress of undesirable elements and create a disciplined task force—impressive not in numbers but in quality—somewhat like Lenin's prescriptions for the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903. But in the eyes of many who were impatient for a movement, all this seemed to be a mere resort to delaying tactics.

In the meantime, Subhas Bose had devised an alternative course of action, which had taken shape at the Anti-Compromise

[94] Gandhi's speech at Subjects Committee, Ramgarh, 18 March 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 71, p. 349. See also Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, pp. 173–77.

[95] Statement on 25 March 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 71, p. 368.

Conference held simultaneously with the Ramgarh Congress session. The main resolution at this Conference proclaimed that Britain had no right to frame a constitution for India and that no "rapprochement with imperialism behind the back of the masses" would be tolerated. The immediate plan of action was "intensification of local struggles" through some sort of civil disobedience.[96] Bose's "movement" was to begin on 6 April—so as to coincide with the National Week. On each day activity would revolve around a specific theme; thus 7 April was to be "Kisan and Mazdoor Day" with meetings to formulate the "rights of [the] Kisan and *mazdoor* communities", 8 April was to be "Anti-War Day", 9 April, "Political Prisoners' Day", 10 April, "Students' Day" and finally 13 April, "Jallianwala Bagh Day".[97] The programme was carried through but with very little enthusiasm. In the UP, for instance, all the meetings were poorly attended with the exception of those in Allahabad and Lucknow.[98] Practical forms of civil disobedience were largely restricted to defiance of orders prohibiting processions and the hoisting of the Congress flag on governmental buildings, which resulted in several arrests.[99] This abortive attempt cost the Forward Bloc dearly and many of the members resigned from the party in sheer disgust.[100] As for other sections of the Left, none had joined Bose's campaign. Instead they were seriously considering the possibility of becoming *satyagrahis*. This is another pointer to the enduring appeal of Gandhi: he could move the people into action even by a limited enrolment campaign—something which Bose with all his dramatic moves was unable to do.

Formation of *Satyagraha Samitis*

In the wake of Gandhi's instructions at Ramgarh, the UPCC Council met at Allahabad (30 March–1 April) and announced its

[96] *The Leader*, 18 March 1940, p. 10.

[97] *PAI UP*, No. 15/1940, 31 March–6 April, pp. 78–79.

[98] *Ibid*., and *PAI UP*, No. 16/1940, 6–13 April, p. 84.

[99] *The Leader*, 9 April 1940, p. 3; 10 April, p. 11, 11 April, p. 4; 12 April, p. 4; 13 April, p. 3; 14 April, p. 7.

[100] *The National Herald*, 9 April 1940, p. 11 for resignations in Hardwar. *The Leader*, 14 April 1940, p. 7 for resignations in Allahabad.

conversion into the biggest *Satyagraha Samiti* of the province.[101] All subordinate committees of the UP Congress were to become *Satyagraha Samitis*. Lists of Congress committees were to be scrutinized and active *satyagrahis* enrolled. However a satyagrahi would be enrolled only *after* he had fully comprehended his duties. Those members of Congress committees who did not wish to become *satyagrahis* would have to resign from the committees. Lists of active *satyagrahis* were to be sent every 15 days to the main office. Each member of a *Satyagraha Samiti* was required to go to the villages to enrol satyagrahis and to maintain contact with the Depressed Classes. They were also entrusted with the task of enrolling Congress members.[102] As for *charkha* and *khadi*, Vichitra Narayan Sharma of the Meerut ashram was appointed organizer of the overall *khadi* programme of the province. While his job was to advise Congressmen and to provide *khadi bhandars* and kendras with all the materials for spinning, the task of enthusing the people about *charkha* spinning and teaching them how to do so remained with the Congress Committee.[103]

There was enthusiasm for the new set of activities outlined by Gandhi among Congressmen of all hues. Enrolment of active *satyagrahis* began in early April as part of the National Week activities. Intriguingly, the earliest reports of large-scale *charkha* activity and enrolment of *satyagrahis* came from Kanpur—a major centre of leftist activity.[104] Even more noteworthy was the urgent circular issued by Damodar Swarup Seth, the General Secretary of the UPCSP, instructing all Congress Socialists of the province to enrol as active *satyagrahis*.[105] This was because "the Party has already accepted Mahatma Gandhi's leadership in the impending national struggle and they cannot reject the constructive programme so much insisted upon by Gandhiji and retain his leadership at same time".[106] Communist Party instructions to its members were that

[101] UPCC Report on *Satyagraha*, 7 April 1940, *AICC*/G-5 (Part I) 1940, pp. 297–301.

[102] *Ibid*.

[103] UPCC Circular No. 8, dated 24 April 1940, *AICC*/G-5 Part I/1940, pp. 221–26.

[104] *The National Herald*, 6 April 1940, p. 1 and 11 April 1940, p. 5.

[105] *The National Herald*, 5 April 1940, p. 4.

[106] *Ibid*.

they should sign the pledge so that the organization could be captured from within.[107]

Unlike the Socialists and Communists, Royists were instructed to adopt a path of defiance—Radical Congressmen would neither enrol as *satyagrahis* nor would they resign their membership of Congress Committees. *Satyagraha* represented a "policy of compromise" and no one could force them to resign from committees to which they had been duly elected.[108] The Dehradun Town Congress Committee, perhaps acting on this advice, outvoted the proposal to turn the Committee into a *satyagraha* unit.[109] But that was the only known instance of defiance of Gandhi's instructions by a Congress committee. In any case, by September 1940, M.N. Roy had been suspended from the Congress and had resigned.[110]

National Week provided an initial boost to the *satyagraha* preparations. From Allahabad, Benares and Mathura there were reports of spinning programmes and enrolment of active *satyagrahis* in this period.[111] The news that in places like Kanpur and Agra Muslim members of the Congress were enrolling as active *satyagrahis* was indeed heartening.[112] By the end of April 1940, the first progress report on *satyagraha* preparations was ready: in the province 5,400 *satyagrahis* had been enrolled. They represented some 65 per cent of DCC members in 22 of the 48 districts of the UP.[113] Thus more than half the districts of the province were yet to be actively involved in the programme. There were cases of resignations from Congress committees owing to disagreement with the Gandhian programme, for example, in Bareilly, nine members of the DCCs and TCCs had resigned for this reason.[114] The UPCC report referred to three categories of Congressmen who had not

[107] Letter from Purnima Banerji to J.B. Kripalani referring to this circular. *AICC*/G-4/1940–41, pp. 51–53.

[108] Instructions from the Secretary to all branches of the UP League of Radical Congressmen, *The Leader*, 22 April 1940, p. 13.

[109] UPCC Secretary's report of 13 May 1940, *AICC*/G-5 Part I/1940, pp. 197–203.

[110] *Home Poll*, 7/7/41 IB Report on M.N. Roy's activities, October 1940–January 1941. See also *SWJN*, 11, p. 249.

[111] *The Leader*, 9 April 1940, p. 5 for Benares; 14 April 1940, p. 4 and 16 April 1940, p. 5 for Allahabad; 22 April 1940, p. 14 for Mathura.

[112] *The National Herald*, 16 April 1940, p. 11.

[113] *The Leader*, 28 April 1940, p. 11.

[114] *PAI UP*, No. 19/1940, 27 April–4 May, p. 99.

enrolled as *satyagrahis*: (*a*) those who were members in name only and habitually did not attend any Congress meetings (Gandhi had made it clear that he wanted to weed out all such members); (*b*) some 23 who had "on conscientious grounds refused to become *satyagrahis*"; and (*c*) those who had declared their intention to become *satyagrahis* but asked for some time to do so.[115]

While it was hoped that the pace of enrolment of *satyagrahis* would increase in the following months, it was equally important to ensure that those who had actually signed the *satyagraha* pledge devoted the greater part of their time to Congress work. This was not easy for those who were engaged in some profession—practising lawyers for instance. Such individuals were required to make a choice; if they could not devote sufficient time to Congress activities, they would have to resign from the Congress committee and make way for more committed members.[116] It was reported that in Gonda a majority of the 350 *satyagrahis* enrolled had later resigned on being told that they would have to go to jail without financial aid for their families.[117]

Gandhi's insistence on rigid adherence to his conditions and a lack of conviction in his programme seems to have affected *satyagraha* preparations at the lowest levels of the Congress organization. While some 75 per cent of district and town-level Congress committee members were said to have enrolled themselves by June 1940, the response at the *mandal* level was rather poor. Of the 2,000 *mandals* in the province, only 800 were functioning as required and the majority of MCC members had not become *satyagrahis*.[118] A Mandal Committee could have anything from 11 to 30 members, of whom not more than four or five had become *satyagrahis*.[119] The only district which could boast of a sizable number of *mandal Satyagraha Samitis* was Unnao, with 47 samitis as opposed to 17 each in Benares and Kanpur and four in Lucknow.[120]

[115] UPCC Report dated 25 April 1940, *AICC*/G-5(Part I)/1940, pp. 397–98.

[116] *Ibid*.

[117] *PAI UP*, No. 19/1940, 27 April–4 May, p. 99.

[118] UPCC Reply to AICC questionnaire, 10 June 1940, *AICC*/G- 5 (Part IV)/1940, p. 133.

[119] *Ibid*., p. 134.

[120] District-wise list of *satyagrahis* enrolled and Mandal Committees functioning as *satyagraha* committees attached to UPCC report of 10 May 1940, *AICC*/G-5/Part I.

Revival of Revolutionary Terrorist Activity

While all this activity was proceeding apace, there was an underlying current of violent rhetoric in the province as well. References to takeover of police stations, jails and courts and looting of government treasuries, cutting of telegraph wires and smashing of railway lines came in from Azamgarh (which had the greatest incidence of such speeches at this time), Sultanpur, Gonda, Fatehpur and even Muzaffarnagar (where the speakers were from Ballia).[121] This not only presaged the forms of protest in the 1942 movement, but testified to the persistence of non-Gandhian strains in the province at this time. This strain could have been more pronounced, but for the fact that leaders who had this kind of potential, such as Manmath Nath Gupta, were already behind bars.

In parts of eastern UP, especially Jaunpur, underground members of the HSRA were also active in this period, planning train dacoities to collect funds for the purchase of weapons to help them over-throw the British Government. Their first successful strike was on 9 July 1940 when a passenger train—the 170Dn Passenger between Lucknow and Mughalsarai—was stopped between Khalispur and Babatpur (Benares district) by bursting crackers and lanterns. In a virtual re-enactment of the Kakori train dacoity of the 1920s, the passengers were asked not to alight: "Keep your windows shut. We have to loot government property." The ransacking of the mail van took about half an hour and a sum of Rs 2,226/8 was appropriated.[122] The money was believed to have been used for the purchase of firearms and for the printing of the "Ranbheri", a revolutionary pamphlet. The incident was believed to have been masterminded by the well-known ex-revolutionary terrorist, Bhupendra Nath Sanyal.[123]

Meanwhile, by 10 July 1940, the province had managed to enrol just 15,200 *satyagrahis* from a total primary membership of 8 lakhs. However, this figure was rather impressive when compared to

[121] *PAI UP*, No. 18/1940, 20–27 April, p. 95; No. 19/1940, 27 April–4 May, pp. 99 and 101–2; No. 20/1940, 4–11 May, p. 106 and No. 21/1940, 11–18 May, p. 109.

[122] *UPSA* CID Files RR Nos 4 and 6.

[123] *Ibid*. Information received by Deputy Superintendent of Police.

that of other provinces—the next largest figure being 6,000 for the North West Frontier Province, followed by 2,765 for Tamil Nadu, 1,991 for Bihar, 1,771 for Gujarat and 1,370 for Andhra.[124]

Intriguingly and for whatever reasons, the districts of eastern UP were more enthusiastic about the Gandhian programme than the western counterparts. The figures for Gorakhpur and Mirzapur (465 each), for Ballia (417), Ghazipur (206), Banda (240), Basti (270), Azamgarh (185) and Gonda (188) indicated a better average than for western and central UP. Jhansi had 95 *satyagrahis*, Meerut 86, Mathura 82, Shahjahanpur 86, Fatehpur 110, Bareilly 113. Bulandshahr with 352, Almora with 323 and Saharanpur with 334 had somewhat better figures and Aligarh had the highest figure for the province with 487. In central UP, Sitapur had 446 *satyagrahis*, Lucknow had only 150, Fyzabad 175, Barabanki 84 and Rae Bareli 73.[125] It would be somewhat far-fetched to make a linkage between this response to the Gandhian programme in 1940 and the role played by eastern UP in the Quit India Movement two years later, since the specificities of the two situations were so different. But it certainly does appear that the remoter rural parts of the province were now more in tune with Gandhi than the established Congress centres. The decision of the CSP to participate in the Gandhian programme at this juncture would have had some impact on mobilization in eastern UP. Correspondingly the relatively poor response to the Individual Satyagraha Movement in these areas may be related to the CSP decision not to participate in the movement.

Even while all these preparations were afoot, statements from Gandhi indicated the evolution of his plan for Individual Satyagraha. On 23 April 1940 he observed: "All I want the Congress to do through civil disobedience is to deny the British Government the moral influence which the Congress co-operation would give."[126] While he virtually ruled out mass civil disobedience, he felt that the choice lay between "individual civil disobedience on a very large scale" and "very restricted" civil disobedience,

[124] *AICC*/G-28 (Part 2)/1940, p. 49.

[125] District-wise list of *satyagrahis* and Mandal Satyagraha Committees, UPCC Report of 10 May, *AICC*/G-5/(Part I)/1940.

[126] *CWMG*, Vol. 72, p. 20.

confined only to himself.[127] By late July he was inclined towards a very restricted form of individual civil disobedience.[128]

Gandhi's decision may have arisen from the dismal record of actual work done by the enrolled *satyagrahis*. In June 1940, the UPCC Secretary complained that members were not doing their work conscientiously and that there was a lack of commitment to *charkha* spinning in particular. Even half the quota of *khadi* yarn fixed for the province (15 million yards) had not been met until 4 June, whereas the quota was to be completed by 15 June.[129]

The Worsening War Situation

Preparations for *satyagraha* were further confounded by the serious reverses that the Allies suffered in the war from April 1940 onwards. The German occupation of Norway in that month, followed by the overrunning of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg by Hitler's troops in May and the final collapse of France in June, affected India in many ways, most of all politically. The immediate popular reaction was one of panic generated by rumours of the collapse of Britain. In the districts of UP there were reports of large-scale withdrawal of deposits from banks.[130] It was considered safer to hoard silver and traders were apparently unwilling to exchange currency notes for silver.[131] The need to organize self-defence was manifest in the sudden spurt in arms and ammunition sales reported from Aligarh, Budaun, Meerut, Moradabad, Muzaffarnagar, Allahabad, Barabanki and Sitapur.[132] For those who did not have access to sophisticated weapons, purchase of bows

[127] *Ibid*.

[128] *CWMG*, Vol. 62, p. 340.

[129] UPCC report of *satyagraha*, 4 June 1940, *AICC*/G-5 (Part I)/1940, pp. 131–35.

[130] One of the first districts to report withdrawal of deposits was Banda in mid-May 1940. *PAI UP*, No. 21/1940, 11–18 May, p. 110. This was followed by Budaun in late May, *PAI UP*, No. 22/1940, 18–25 May, p. 114; Gonda, Rae Bareli and Jhansi in early June, *PAI UP*, No. 25/1940, 8–15 June, p. 131.

[131] *PAI UP*, No. 23/1940, 25 May–1 June, p. 119.

[132] *PAI UP*, Nos 24 and 26/1940, 1–8 June and 15–22 June, pp. 126 and 139 respectively.

and spears was the only resort. German radio broadcasts were listened to rather attentively, despite the government orders banning tuning to these stations.[133] In Banda, a popular rumour was that Hitler would reach India by 19 June. Such an eventuality was apparently not anticipated with dread—indeed the province at this time displayed a sneaking admiration for Hitler's strength and invincibility![134]

In such circumstances, all talk of civil disobedience receded into the background. The people seemed to have forgotten Gandhi's instructions to prepare for *satyagraha*. In fact, at the level of the Congress leadership, serious doubts began to be expressed about the feasibility of adhering to a policy of non-violence during the war. While Gandhi continued to hold the view that India should not involve herself in this or any war, others felt that the defence of India must be organized to prevent external aggression. These views found expression in the resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee at Wardha on 21 June 1940:

> While the Working Committee hold that the Congress must continue to adhere strictly to the principle of non-violence in their struggle for independence, the Committee cannot ignore the present imperfections and failings in this respect of the human elements that they have to deal with.... The Committee have deliberated over the problem that has thus arisen and have come to the conclusion that they are unable to go the full length with Gandhiji...they...absolve him from responsibility for the programme and activity which the Congress has to pursue under the conditions at present prevailing in India and the world.... Congress Committees should organize, wherever necessary, people in villages and other areas for self-defence and in order to maintain a sense of public security in their respective areas.[135]

[133] *PAI UP*, No. 24/1940, p. 126.

[134] *PAI UP*, No. 28/1940, 29 June–6 July, p. 132. Pro-German posters stating "Hitler's aim is to make the country free and we should welcome him" were found in Benares in late June. *PAI UP*, No. 27/1940, 22–29 June, p. 146. In Fatehpur a speech at a Congress volunteer rally was all about how British rule in India would be finished by Hitler and how German rule was far more preferable. *PAI UP*, No. 28/1940, 29 June–6 July, p. 152.

[135] *SWJN*, Vol. 11, pp. 55–58.

Thus the Congress had taken a major step: it had chosen to relieve Gandhi of the responsibility of leading the Congress, so as to organize internal security and India's defence.[136] This step was advanced further at the emergency meeting of the Congress Working Committee in Delhi from 3–7 July when a resolution framed by C. Rajagopalachari, calling for an unequivocal declaration of India's independence and the immediate creation of such a provisional National Government as would "command the confidence of all the elected members in the Central Legislature", was adopted. Only then, the resolution stated, would Congress be able to "throw in its full weight in the efforts for the effective organization of the Defence of the country".[137] There was no unanimity on this decision. It is known that while Sardar Patel, Rajaji, Bhulabhai Desai, Jamnalal Bajaj, Syed Mahmud, Asaf Ali and Pattabhi Sitaramayya voted for the resolution, Nehru, Acharya Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhan voted against it. So did Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan on grounds of non-violence. Sarojini Naidu, Rajendra Prasad, Shankarrao Deo, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Acharya Kripalani remained neutral.[138] Seldom before had there been such a multipolar division in the Congress. "Rajaji has stabbed us in the back", wrote an anguished Jayaprakash Narayan to Jawaharlal Nehru on 27 July. He felt that if there was to be a settlement, Jawaharlal Nehru had best "leave the Congress and form another political organization".[139]

What came to be known as the Delhi offer of the Congress was debated at length when the AICC met at Poona on 28 July. The resolution confirming the offer was passed by 95 votes to 47. About 40 members including Nehru, Prasad and Acharya Kripalani remained neutral.[140] But there was a further twist to the tale. Shortly

[136] To this Gandhi's response was: "I congratulate the members on their honesty and courage, though I am sorry for myself that I could not inspire them with confidence in our creed and in my leadership. " Speech at Gandhi Seva Sangh and *Charkha* Sangh meeting, 22 June 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 72, p. 193.

[137] A.M. Zaidi and S.G. Zaidi, eds, *The Encyclopaedia of the INC*, Vol. 12, p. 429.

[138] B.N. Pande, ed., *A Centenary History*, Vol. 3, p. 355.

[139] *JN Papers*, Vol. 54, p. 60

[140] B.N. Pande, ed., *A Centenary History*, Vol. 3, p. 360.

after the Poona meeting, all but four members of the Working Committee sent in their resignations to Maulana Azad because they felt that India should not participate in the war. This action practically buried the Delhi–Poona offer of the Congress, since Azad requested the members not to resign and accepted their terms.[141]

With the top-level Congress leadership thus torn by internal differences, one could hardly expect any serious mobilization work in the provinces. However, in the UP there was a revival of interest in volunteering and Seva Dal activities. In the panic-stricken month of June, volunteer training seemed an effective means of organizing self-defence.[142] Even *satyagrahis* were reported to be attending volunteer training camps in Azamgarh, Aligarh, Sultanpur, Bulandshahr and Almora.[143] The PCC coordinated these efforts by allocating 4 and 5 July as days when special attention would be paid to volunteering through the holding of rallies, etc.[144] Once again, Aligarh seemed to be pursuing the new programme with vigour and in a more systematic fashion. The DCC had divided the whole district into 16 *kendras* (centres). Within each *kendra* there would be five to six Congress *mandals* and 20–25 volunteers in charge of a *sardar* or captain. Each *kendra* was entrusted with the task of supervising Congress work in its region, raising subscriptions for Congress funds and of maintaining public peace.[145] By and large, it was reported that it was becoming increasingly difficult to tell *satyagrahis* apart from volunteers.[146] Obviously, the work of the former had merged inextricably with that of the latter. Government sources put the figure of total volunteers for the UP at 30,178 by the end of June 1940.[147] But this was still far short of the intended target of one lakh volunteers.[148]

If preparations for civil disobedience had suffered a setback, anti-British feeling was nevertheless manifest in different forms.

[141] *Ibid*., p. 361.
[142] *PAI UP*, No. 28/1940, 29 June–6 July, p. 152.
[143] *PAI UP*, No. 26/1940, 15–22 June, p. 142.
[144] *PAI UP*, No. 27/1940, 22–29 June, p. 149.
[145] *PAI UP*, No. 31/1940, 20–27 July, p. 171.
[146] *PAI UP*, No. 29/1940, 6–13 July, p. 159.
[147] *Home Poll*, 4/1/40, p. 14–24.
[148] *Ibid*.

The people were extremely receptive to anti-war propaganda. By July–August 1940, the focus had shifted from anti-recruitment to opposing forced war subscriptions, probably because the authorities had stepped up their efforts to realize contributions to the war effort.[149] Leaflets circulated by the UPCC protesting against forced realization of war subscriptions were recovered from different parts of the province. Modified versions of these leaflets were also being produced by individual DCCs and circulated in their respective districts.[150] These leaflets and circulars caused considerable embarrassment to the British Government, which was anxious to prove that there was no coercion in war subscriptions.[151]

Defiance of and resentment towards British rule was accentuated by the government's decision to impose a ban on volunteering activities by an order of 6 August 1940.[152] That the people of the province would not accept any restrictions on their most popular campaign was evident from the 20,000 strong crowd which turned up for the volunteer rally and Nehru's address at Kanpur on 11 August 1940.[153] Addressing the rally, Nehru reflected the changed mood of the Congress, provoked by the extremely paltry offer made by the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, on 8 August:

> There is an atmosphere of expectancy, determined enthusiasm and cool courage reminiscent of the civil disobedience days. It appears as if the whole of Cawnpore has turned out to offer its support to the Congress as against the reported move of the government to ban even a rally of the non-violent Seva Dal volunteers.... There is an unbridgeable gulf between the

[149] At the UPCC EC Meeting of 15 June 1940 it was reported that "Zamindars are made to pay a percentage of their revenue, Government servants a part of their salaries, sums are deducted from the wages of workers and Kisans are in some places forced to pay a sum for every plough or are induced to pay something for the war funds when they come to court as litigants." *UPCC EC Proceedings*.

[150] *PAI UP*, No. 32/1940, 27 July–3 August, p. 177.

[151] Hallett to Linlithgow, 17 September 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F.125/103, pp. 241–42.

[152] *Home Poll*, 18/7/40, FR UP ii.

[153] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1940, 10–17 August, pp. 188–89. Lala Padampat Singhania, a Kanpur industrialist, made a contribution of Rs 2,500 to this rally.

> Congress demand and the Viceroy's pronouncement and I do not see how we can accept it.[154]

He followed this up with a similar visit to Benares, where his meeting was attended by some three to four thousand. But Nehru advised restraint and even a policy of compromise with the British Government. In any case, he advised Congressmen to await the instructions of the Working Committee.[155]

Soon thereafter began the major arrests in the province. It may be mentioned here that even earlier, by May 1940, arrests of district-level Congressmen, serving of notices under Section 144, fines for selling seditious literature, searches of newspaper offices and demands of security from newspapers had already begun.[156] Major Left leaders like Balkrishna Sharma and Rammanohar Lohia had been arrested under the Defence of India Rules (DIR) in May–June 1940.[157] Some Congress MLAs, for example, Chaudhury Charan Singh, had been arrested in late July 1940.[158] That the Hallett administration intended to take the Congress bull by the horns was evident in the decision to arrest no less a person than S.K.D. Paliwal, President of the UPCC, under Section 144 Cr.P.C. for defying a ban on his participating in processions and delivering speeches in Farrukhabad District.[159] But if the Governor intended this arrest to have an intimidating effect, his expectations were belied. The arrest only whipped up public excitement. The follow-up arrest of Balkrishna Sharma under the DIR for holding protest meetings in connection with Paliwal's arrest heightened the tempo. Meetings and *hartals* were reported from places as distant as Basti and Mirzapur as well as from practically every district of western UP.[160]

What gave a further boost to the defiant spirit was the inability of the government of the UP to arrest Jawaharlal Nehru for all his seditious activity in the province. This was because the Government of India was yet hopeful of a negotiated settlement with the

[154] *SWJN*, Vol. 11, pp. 116–17.

[155] *Ibid*.

[156] Report of repression prepared by the UPCC General Secretary, 30 May 1940, *AICC*/G-25/1940, p. 259.

[157] *SWJN*, Vol. 11, p. 309.

[158] *PAI UP*, No. 32/1940, 27 July–3 August, p. 177.

[159] *PAI UP*, No. 35/1940, 17–24 August, pp. 192–93.

[160] *Ibid*.

Congress and did not want to alienate the leadership at this juncture. But if Nehru's arrest was not on the cards, the Hallett Government was not going to compromise on lesser leaders. By September 1940, a total of 640 arrests of Congressmen had taken place in the province. Kanpur headed the list with 93 arrests.[161] Doubtless, repression had been unleashed in the province and the stage set for Gandhi's movement of civil disobedience in defence of the right to freedom of speech during the war period.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that the Congress was in a state of flux during the 12 months after the outbreak of the war. The decisions arrived at by the Congress Working Committee were not easy ones as there were major differences among top-level Congressmen.

Intriguingly, for a province like the UP, there was a visible gravitation towards Gandhi in this period. The popularity of Subhas Bose was seriously affected. But, even while looking towards Gandhi, Congressmen in the province were reluctant to endorse his methods whole-heartedly or in a sustained manner. Differences with the Mahatma were articulated in various ways and at several moments. Attempts were even made to work out alternative strategies of opposition to the war but none of them had the depth of understanding that informed the Gandhian strategy. Moreover they aroused the ire of the Hallett administration which was by no means as tolerant of free expression as the Pant ministry and by September 1940, a significant number of prominent Congressmen in the UP had been arrested.

Jawaharlal Nehru's role was a multi-faceted one at this time. His views on the war and the position that the Congress should adopt were taken very seriously by Gandhi at least, though the two had their differences on this issue. When the fortunes of Britain took a turn for the worse in the summer of 1940, the Gandhi–Nehru rift was very pronounced. However, in the midst of all this, Nehru found time to address volunteer gatherings in Kanpur and Benares

[161] *Home Poll*, 18/8/40, FR UP ii.

just when the provincial authorities had promulgated a ban on volunteer activity. This was followed by meetings with Kisans in the Gorakhpur countryside and the rousing of "agrarian ferment" according to worried district officials.

As a backdrop to all the happenings described in this chapter was the noticeably rigid and uncompromising stance of the colonial authorities. For them the war was a convenient excuse for tightening the reins which had been so distressingly slackened during the experiment with provincial autonomy. Gandhi's campaign of Individual Satyagraha, when it unfolded, was to engage with precisely this issue, as will be seen in the following chapter.

EIGHT

Gathering Momentum: From Individual to "All Out Satyagraha", 1940–42

In August 1940, the Congress became virtually unanimous in its condemnation of the British Government and its war policies. The spirit of accommodation, which Rajagopalachari had persuaded the Congress to adopt in June–July 1940, even at the cost of a break with Gandhi, had yielded no results. After the meagre offer made by the British Government in August, an embittered Congress closed its ranks. Even those Congressmen who were sceptical of Gandhi's scheme of non-violence against external aggression, returned to the Gandhian fold.[1] Gandhi, they conceded, had the most accurate understanding of British policy.

Therefore, after a two month interlude, they allowed him to resume the role of prime arbiter between the Congress and the government. This was evident in Maulana Azad's polite refusal of an offer to meet the Viceroy and discuss the 8 August offer.[2]

[1] AICC resolution at Bombay, 15 and 16 September 1940, A.M. Zaidi and S.G. Zaidi, *The Encyclopaedia of the INC*, Vol. 12, p. 376. "In view of certain misapprehensions that have arisen in regard to the Congress Policy of non-violence, the AICC desire to state this afresh, and to make it clear that this policy continues, notwithstanding anything contained in previous resolutions which may have led to these misapprehensions."

[2] Maulana Azad's telegrams of 8 August and 16 August and letter of 19 August to Linlithgow, reproduced in Telegram R No. 1672-S dated 22 August 1940 from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/19, p. 305.

Instead, it was Gandhi who sought an interview with Lord Linlithgow in late August 1940.[3] This request was granted by a somewhat triumphant Viceroy who remarked to the Secretary of State that Gandhi was probably looking for avenues to reopen negotiations so as to avoid adopting an extreme policy.[4]

To his utter amazement, Gandhi adopted a clearly belligerent tone at the meeting. From Linlithgow's account of the encounter, we get the impression that Gandhi had merely come to give vent to his feelings—all his utterances took the form of a tirade against British rule in India.[5] Gandhi, on the other hand, claimed that he had gone to meet the Viceroy in order to find out whether his suppositions about the British Government's position were correct. He was bitterly disappointed to find that Lord Linlithgow was even unwilling to *discuss* matters with him.[6]

However, the significance of this disastrous encounter must not be missed. By seeking an interview with the Viceroy when he was not in a mood for compromise, Gandhi was taking the first step towards *satyagraha*. This was an integral part of his strategy. One is reminded of the opening lines of his historic letter to Lord Irwin on the eve of the Dandi March:

> Dear Friend—Before embarking on civil disobedience and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years, I would fain approach you and find a way out.[7]

[3] Gandhi's letter to the Viceroy dated 19 August 1940, Telegram R from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, 1 September 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/19, p. 305.

[4] "I had a little the feeling as I read his manifesto of 27th August...that it might be another of the instances in which he thought it well to deal with the situation by giving the extremer party as much rope as they would have and then coming down himself in the light of discussion in favour of something very definitely less extreme." Linlithgow to Amery, 19 September 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/9, p. 358; and again in a telegram on 22 September: "I am disposed to agree with you that Gandhi himself is anxious for a way out...." *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/19, p. 351.

[5] "He started off with a speech lasting an hour in which he attacked in the most vigorous terms the whole course of British policy in India over the last 100 years." Telegram from the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, 27 September 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/19, p. 367.

[6] Gandhi's statement to the Press about his interview with the Viceroy, 5 October 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 78, p. 78.

[7] Letter to Lord Irwin, 2 March 1930, *CWMG*, Vol. 43, pp. 2–8.

It was his usual practice to thus give notice of his intentions, while at the same time indicating willingness to compromise even at this late stage. Of course, all this was done in the full realization that the other side was either unwilling or not in a position to make any compromises at that juncture.

If Gandhi was thus preparing the ground for a mass movement at New Delhi, in the interior of the UP, Jawaharlal Nehru was making a complementary effort at embarrassing the British Government. Shortly after the government had imposed a ban on volunteer activity, Nehru addressed a volunteer rally at Kanpur on 11 August.[8] Significantly, the government chose not to arrest him at this juncture, though the authorities in the UP cracked down on organizers of Qaumi Seva Dal camps and disbanded volunteer groups in several parts of the province in late August–September 1940.[9]

Nehru then shifted the scene of his activities to Gorakhpur, where he took up the problems of sugar cane growers and others arising from certain anomalies in the Tenancy Bill. In the words of officials in the UP, he was rousing "considerable agrarian ferment".[10] The fact that Nehru's arrest required to be cleared not merely from New Delhi but all the way from Whitehall was most trying for the provincial authorities. Just when the Governor of the UP was pressing for his arrest so as to prevent the situation in the province from deteriorating further, the Secretary of State and the War Cabinet advised a policy of caution and restraint.[11]

[8] *PAI UP*, No. 34/1940, 10–17 August, p. 188.

[9] In Kanpur, two volunteer captains were arrested on 30 August. *The Pioneer*, 31 August 1940, p. 5. Shortly thereafter, K.D. Malaviya, Secretary and Camp Director of the QSD Instructors' Training Camp was arrested at Allahabad along with the Kanpur Camp Director. *The Pioneer*, 2 September 1940, p. 2. By mid-September a total of 94 volunteers had been arrested in Kanpur and 70 in Aligarh. *The National Herald*, 14 September 1940, p. 3.

In Basti too, arrests of volunteers on 2 September were reported. *Ibid*., 7 September 1940, p. 2.

[10] Telegram from the Governor of the UP to the Viceroy dated 16 October 1940, *Home Poll*, 3/13/40.

[11] Telegram from the Viceroy to the Governor of the UP dated 15 October 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F.125/103, p. 84.

Gandhi's Individual Satyagraha

On 11 October 1940, when the Congress Working Committee met, Gandhi unfolded his scheme for Individual Satyagraha. The very limitedness of the campaign which, according to Gandhi, was to be launched solely to establish and assert the right of freedom of speech, baffled everyone within and outside the Congress. Of little help were Gandhi's explanatory comments that this was only a token movement to prevent the Congress from becoming extinct and that he had no desire to embarrass the British Government. However, he did indicate that the movement would widen if the authorities provoked the Congress.[12] *The Leader* stated that most members of the Working Committee, were "aghast" at the "futility" of the intended movement. Nehru and Azad, in particular, were highly sceptical of the proposal.[13]

Four days after the Working Committee meeting, on 17 October, Gandhi's first satyagrahi, Vinoba Bhave, a veritable political non-entity, made his anti-war speech to an audience of 300 at Paunar in Maharashtra.[14] Though the Government of India did not think it fit to arrest Vinoba until the fifth day, it placed restrictions on newspapers covering news of the *satyagraha*. All newspaper editors received notes to the effect that any news pertaining to *satyagraha* would first have to be censored by the Chief Press Advisor.[15] On receiving such notice, Gandhi dashed off a telegram to the Viceroy asking if censorship was sought to be introduced.[16] The Viceroy tried to make light of the issue by saying that this was merely a

[12] Telegram from the Viceroy to the Governor of the UP dated 15 October 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F.125/103, p. 84.

[13] *The Leader*, 18 October 1940, p. 9. Also see Gandhi's statement on the eve of Individual Satyagraha: "I have had three days discussion with the Working Committee. During it I unfolded my plan of Civil Disobedience.... There was stubborn dissent from two members I tried hard to carry conviction to them but I fear I failed." *AICC*/G-3/1940, p. 17.

[14] *The Pioneer*, 19 October 1940, p. 8.

[15] Cited by Gandhi in his statement to the Press on 24 October 1940, in which he quoted from the letter received by the editor of *Harijan* from the office of the DM, Patna, *CWMG*, Vol. 58, p. 124. See also the Viceroy's telegram to the Secretary of State dated 24 October 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/19, p. 406.

[16] Gandhi's telegram to Lord Linlithgow dated 21 October 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 83, p. 117.

recommendation and that the real initiative lay in the hands of newspapermen themselves.[17] Retorting that "advice whose rejection may involve penalty is very like mandate", Gandhi announced the suspension of publication of his *Harijan*, *Harijanbandhu* and *Harijansewak*.[18] The role of the press in the Individual Satyagraha Movement, especially in the case of the UP, was significant and will be dwelt upon later in this chapter.

On 21 October, Vinoba Bhave was arrested. Yet, Gandhi, far from being pleased at this development, was so dispirited as to consider suspending the whole campaign,[19] and of substituting it with a fast. But he was dissuaded by Nehru, who felt that the time for a fast had not yet arrived. Instead he offered himself as the next satyagrahi—a suggestion that was accepted by Gandhi. When this news reached government circles, the earlier complacency about the movement evaporated. Unlike Vinoba, Nehru not only enjoyed great mass credibility, but had already proved himself to be an ace troublemaker in the recent past. His power over the masses could turn the Individual Satyagraha campaign on to a most dangerous path. It was imperative to arrest him before he could make *any satyagraha* speech.[20] Thus, while returning from Sevagram, Nehru was arrested at Cheoki station on 31 October and sentenced to the rather severe term of four years' rigorous imprisonment by the district judge of Gorakhpur.[21]

According to official reports, the event of Nehru's arrest did not cause very great public excitement, except among students. Even in Gorakhpur, the scene of his most virulent speeches in the preceding days, official sources noted that his trial did not spark off much interest.[22] However the report of the AICC General Secretary for this period states:

[17] Linlithgow's letter to Gandhi, 24 October 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/19, p. 406.

[18] Gandhi's telegram to Lord Linlithgow dated 25 October 1940 and his statement to the Press, 24 October 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 83, pp. 130 and 124 respectively.

[19] See Nehru's conversations with Mahatma Gandhi, 29 October 1940, *SWJN*, Vol. 11, pp. 193–94.

[20] Telegram R from the Governor-General to the Governor of the UP dated 31 October 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/103, p. 94.

[21] *Home Poll*, 18/10/40, FR UP ii.

[22] *PAI UP*, No. 46/1940, 1–8 November, p. 2.

> The news of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's arrest...had an electric effect on the public. There were spontaneous demonstrations all over the country, *hartals* in cities and towns and strikes by students in universities, colleges and schools.[23]

What did generate much debate, both within the UP and outside, was the severity of the sentence imposed on Nehru. He was ostensibly convicted for his anti-war utterances, whereas the bulk of his speeches at Gorakhpur and elsewhere had been on agrarian issues. When Mahadev Desai, in a conversation with top government officials, asked them whether there was evidence in Nehru's speeches of anti-recruitment and anti-war propaganda, they were evasive. All of them agreed that Nehru's sentence was too severe.[24] In England the Secretary of State, L.S. Amery, had to face criticism regarding the severity of Nehru's sentence; indeed the pressure was so great as to compel him to suggest to the Viceroy that perhaps Nehru's term could be reduced.[25]

Nehru's intervention in the Individual Satyagraha campaign, though nipped in the bud, served to build up considerable momentum. Thereafter Gandhi announced detailed plans for the movement.[26] Individual Satyagraha was to take place in four phases. The first phase, which had begun with Vinoba was to include only those selected by Gandhi himself. The second phase, beginning in November was to include members of the Congress

[23] A.M. Zaidi, ed., *The Story of Congress Pilgrimage*, Vol. 4, 1940–55, Delhi, 1990, p. 22.

[24] Extracts from Mahadev Desai's Delhi Diary, 11 November 1940 and 13 November 1940; conversations with Puckle, Tottenham and Laithwaite, reproduced in G.D. Birla, ed., *Bapu: A Unique Association*, Vol. 4, Delhi, 1977, pp. 138–39 and 155–56 respectively.

[25] Secretary of State's notes to the Viceroy, 8 November 1940 and 14 November 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/9, p. 221.

[26] "I had hoped to be able to confine civil disobedience to two or three and supplement it if necessary...with a fast limited or unlimited.... The changed plan consists in extending civil disobedience to qualified persons selected from particular group. The groups touched at present are members of the Legislature and members of the Working Committee." Gandhi's letter to Laithwaite, 11 November 1940, Birla, ed., *Bapu: A Unique Association*, Vol. 4, pp. 135–36.

Working Committee, AICC members, PCC members and Congress MLAs and Members of Legislative Councils (MLCs). This phase would last until late December 1940. In the third phase, beginning from 6 January 1941, lower Congress functionaries, members of DCCs and TCCs, including women, would court arrest. From mid-February until 5 April 1941, members of Mandal and other Congress Committees would also court arrest. In the final phase, four anna Congress members would offer *satyagraha*. Each PCC had to draw up a list of *satyagrahis* and get the approval of Gandhi well in advance. Each prospective satyagrahi had to give two days' notice to the local authorities.[27] There was to be "no secrecy about the movement" according to Gandhi. On the appointed day, the satyagrahi would make a speech, which was a standard piece drawn up by Gandhi, with no improvizations or additions.[28]

From the formula given here two things are clearly apparent: one, that Gandhi intended to keep the reins of the movement tightly in his hands; two, that the entire movement was to be conducted on a high moralistic plane and in an extremely restrained fashion. Why were such severe restrictions placed on a movement which was, after all, intended to arouse the masses out of passivity?

To understand the possible reasons for the nature of Gandhi's movement of 1940–41, we would have to locate it in the context of the then-prevailing British policy towards the Congress. Progressively since the outbreak of the war and the promulgation of the Defence of India Rules, there had been a hardening of official position vis-à-vis the Congress. Crystallization of these views had come in the drafting of the Revolutionary Movements Ordinance in 1940—an all-encompassing draconian ordinance, which was clearly intended for the Congress in case it launched a mass movement. By terming the movement a "revolutionary movement" an

[27] "On being selected, a Satyagrahi had to go to his own Congress Committee area, home town or village, and formally notify the Magistrate of his intention to break the law and give the date, time and place of his sayagraha." B.N. Pande, ed., *A Centenary History*, Vol. 3, p. 407.

[28] Gandhi's "Instructions to Satyagrahis", 8 November 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 73, pp. 157–59. The two-line speech of each satyagrahi was: "It is wrong to help the British war-effort with men or money. The only worthy effort is to resist all war with non-violent resistance." B.R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography*, p. 443.

all-out offensive against it could be launched.[29] However, the seemingly trivial Individual Satyagraha campaign could not justify the use of so powerful a weapon. Gandhi's insistence on a highly disciplined and conscientiously peaceful movement precluded any attempts at placing on it the stamp of a "revolutionary movement". And yet a movement was conducted which lasted for a year and successfully involved thousands of Indians. Throughout this period the draft Revolutionary Movements Ordinance had to remain in cold storage. Thus, by not falling into the colonial administrators' trap of launching just the type of movement that was anticipated, Gandhi cleverly side-stepped what could have been a veritable disaster at this stage.

If Individual Satyagraha had its justification in terms of posing a challenge to British policy, there was also another possible reason for its enigmatic nature. A close look at the Congress organization in the 1939–40 period in the preceding chapter revealed its heterogeneous nature and the absence of a common perspective among the members on very basic issues. By insisting on a rigidly controlled movement alone could Gandhi ensure a minimum accordance with his directions.

Yet, there is no doubt that Individual Satyagraha was the least spectacular of all the Gandhian movements, even failing to arouse mass sympathy at times. However, if there was one province which responded enthusiastically to the movement, it was the UP. We shall, therefore, see how the movement unfolded itself in the province.

In a province that was impatient with Gandhi for having so delayed the launching of a mass movement, great indeed must have been the relief at the announcement of the Individual Satyagraha campaign. On the other hand, to most Congressmen in the UP whose faith in non-violence was more or less extinct, a movement based on such high moral principles must have been irksome indeed!

[29] *Home Poll*, 3/13/40, D.O. from Maxwell to Laithwaite of 25 April 1940 regarding action in approach of Civil Disobedience Movement in which he pointed out that "if the measures taken to counter a revolutionary movement are to have full effect it seems clear that Government must convince the public that they are out not merely to reduce the Congress to a condition in which they will be prepared to make terms but to crush the Congress finally as a political organisation".

There is evidence to suggest that Individual Satyagraha was first launched in the UP in an atmosphere of bewilderment and uncertainty. Even though the individuals courting arrest in the first phase of the movement were persons of political stature, for example, G.B. Pant, K.N. Katju, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, other MLAs, MLCs and members of the AICC, it appeared as if they also did not understand the movement too well.[30] Despite Gandhi's instructions to confine the *satyagraha* to rural areas,[31] leaders took care to hold their *satyagraha* meetings close to urban centres or in "Congress-minded areas" so as to generate public enthusiasm.[32] One cannot but compare this scenario with the spontaneous response to Nehru's agrarian campaign in eastern UP.

Individual Satyagraha in the province took off in a tame fashion from Haldwani (on the foothills of Nainital), where ex-Premier G.B. Pant offered *satyagraha*. Thereafter it was taken up in Allahabad, the headquarters of the AICC and an old Congress stronghold.[33] It then fanned out, according to police sources, into those areas where the Congress organization was very strong—Kanpur, Unnao, Meerut, Moradabad, Kheri and Fyzabad.[34] In all these districts, the preference was to conduct *satyagraha* at places close to large cities since, in the rural areas, it failed to evoke much response.[35] Large parts of the province were unaffected by the movement even at the end of November 1940.

It was only from December that the authorities in the UP, perhaps sensing some accretion of public sympathy for the *satyagrahis*, adopted a policy of pre-emptive arrests. As soon as a satyagrahi gave the mandatory 48-hour notice of his intention to offer *satyagraha*, arrangements for his arrest were made.[36] In this way the possibility of crowds gathering, even if only out of sheer curiosity

[30] *PAI UP*, No. 43/1940, 11–18 October, p. 1.

[31] In his conversation with Nehru at Wardha just before the latter's arrest, Gandhi had said "History will record the importance we gave to the village in this our last fight". *SWJN*, Vol. 2, p. 197.

[32] *PAI UP*, No. 49/1940, 22–29 November, pp. 1–2.

[33] *Ibid*.

[34] *Ibid*.

[35] *Ibid*.

[36] *PAI UP*, No. 51/1940, 6–13 December, p. 1. The erstwhile ministers, Sampurnanand and K.N. Katju were arrested in this manner. See also *Home Poll*, 18/11/40, FR UP i.

to see one of their leaders being arrested, was denied to the agitators.

Curiously enough, Gandhi himself had warned Congressmen not to whip up any kind of mass enthusiasm by holding public meetings in cities (though he was willing to have such meetings in villages). Further, according to Instruction No. 8, "All demonstrations should be avoided when civil disobedience is offered".[37] As Gandhi himself put it, "The idea is to prevent the movement from lapsing into mass civil disobedience".[38] This must have been immensely frustrating indeed for the average Congressman whose main forms of activity in the past had been meetings, speeches and demonstrations and who believed in a mass oriented movement. Congress Socialists had, in any case, decided to stay out of the movement for tactical reasons—feeling that it was inopportune to be locked up in jails at this time.[39]

During the first phase of Individual Satyagraha, university students were the only section of society in the UP to show any great enthusiasm for the movement. Of course, this is not to suggest that they were involved in the Gandhian campaign in any significant way—Gandhi had clearly excluded them from the programme of Individual Satyagraha unless they suspended their studies.[40] Yet, students often constituted the most conspicuous element at meetings related to Individual Satyagraha. Moreover, strikes, public processions and meetings were almost a daily feature in the colleges of Kanpur, Lucknow, Benares and Allahabad during the months of November and December 1940. Most of these outbursts were directed against a circular issued by the Director of Public Instruction authorizing heads of institutions to rusticate those students who indulged in disruptive activities.[41] Intelligence reports also detected the hand of the Communists, who were seeking to wrest control of the Students Federation from the Congress Socialists, in these acts of defiance.[42] However, this militancy was

[37] Gandhi's "Instructions to Satyagrahis", *CWMG*, Vol. 73, pp. 156–57.

[38] *Ibid*.

[39] *PAI UP*, No. 51/1940, 13–27 December, p. 3.

[40] Statement to the Press, 29 November 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 73, pp. 203–4.

[41] *PAI UP*, No. 47/1940, 8–15 November, p. 5.

[42] *Home Poll*, 7/1/41, monthly summary of information relating to CPI for November 1940, January 1941 and February 1941.

not confined to student-related issues alone; students showed great keenness to participate in the larger political movement.

Of all the districts of the UP, Kanpur evinced the keenest interest in the Individual Satyagraha Movement. Not only were the crowds that turned up here to attend *satyagraha* meetings sizable, but the district maintained a steady, uninterrupted flow of *satyagrahis* through the first and second phases and even in the much more difficult third and fourth phases of the movement.[43] Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that Kanpur was a major centre for volunteer activity from 1938 onwards.

In the first phase, all Congressmen who gave notice of *satyagraha* were duly arrested. But the terms of imprisonment accorded to them varied greatly. While the erstwhile Premier, G.B. Pant, was given a year's simple imprisonment by the Haldwani Magistrate, the former Minister of Justice, K.N. Katju, was accorded 18 months' rigorous imprisonment and a heavy fine by the local magistrate. On the other hand, the former Minister for Local Self-Government, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, received a rather light sentence of four months' simple imprisonment.[44] All these terms were moderate when compared with Nehru's conviction. What accounted for this? Was it due to the local credibility enjoyed by these leaders, enhanced by their tenure in office? If so, then at least some of the misgivings of governmental hardliners regarding the ill-effects of provincial autonomy and Congress acceptance of office had been realized.[45]

The Press found itself affected by the new Congress movement rather adversely: a government order prohibited them from

[43] *PAI UP*, No. 50/1940, 30 November–6 December, p. 1; No. 1/1941, 27 December–3 January, p. 1; No. 2/1941, 3–10 January 1941, p. 2; No. 9/1941, 14–21 February, p. 11; No. 11/1941, 1–7 March, p. 19; No. 12/1941, 7–14 March, p. 23; No. 13/1941, 14–21 March, p. 27; No. 14/1941, 21–28 March, p. 31; No. 15/1941, 28 March–4 April, p. 36; No. 17/1941, 11–18 April, p. 45. As late as in mid-June 1941, Kanpur provided 95 *Satyagrahis* in the course of one week. *PAI UP*, No. 26/1941, 13–20 June, p. 89.

[44] *The Leader*, 1 December 1940, p. 6.

[45] See *Home Poll*, 3/11/40, pp. 26–36, summary of replies by Governors to the Governor-General on matters if Section 93 arises. In reply to a query about how far government servants could be expected to go in dealing with the Congress, the UP Governor's reply was: "There might occasionally be hesitation in acting against prominent right-wing leaders—men whose character inspires respect...."

publishing any *satyagraha* news. This order was not looked upon kindly by the nationalist and liberal press especially given the contrast between government's eagerness to disseminate war news and their refusal to allow more than the barest factual information on *satyagraha* to be published. Sections of the Press even threatened to boycott government war news.[46] *The National Herald* and the *Sainik* ran into open trouble with the government for publishing *satyagraha* news in defiance of the ban.[47]

In order to overcome the disadvantages of being denied press coverage, the UPCC had to establish its own courier service for carrying regular news bulletins and circulars from one area to the other.[48] Gandhi had, of course, suggested that each individual should be a walking newspaper.[49]

The second phase of the Individual Satyagraha campaign began on 6 January 1941 and involved presidents of DCCs and City Congress Committees (CCCs), followed by PCC members, women *satyagrahis* and then office-bearers of DCCs, CCCs and TCCs. Unlike the first phase, it was more systematized and witnessed the participation of virtually every district in the province.[50] This phase also entailed the dismantling of the Congress apparatus at the district and town levels—the committees themselves were dissolved by mid-February and their functions taken over by the dictators as per Gandhi's instructions.[51] All the normal activities of the PCC were suspended. Moreover, as searches of Congress offices began, important papers and the money of these Congress units were shifted underground. The fact that this move went

[46] *PAI UP*, No. 45/1940, 25 October–1 November 1940, p. 6.

[47] *PAI UP*, No. 43/1940, 11–18 October, p. 1. and No. 50/1940, 30 November–6 December, p. 2.

[48] Arrangements for this had been made by early November itself with all branches of the PCC being asked to contribute Rs 25 for this. *PAI UP*, No. 45/1940, 25 October–1 November, p. 2. References to these cyclostyled newssheets are also available in *PAI UP*, No. 46/1940, 1–8 November, p. 3.

[49] Statement to the Press, 24 October 1940, *CWMG*, Vol. 73, p. 126.

[50] *PAI UP*, No. 2/1941, 3–10 January, p. 1.

[51] *The Pioneer*, 6 February 1941, p. 3. The dictator's main task was to prepare fresh lists of *satyagrahis* and hand them over to Gandhi at Wardha. For a while Acharya Narendra Dev functioned as the dictator but after his arrest in January 1941, A.P. Jain took over. Thereafter Balkrishna Keskar took over and after his arrest P.D. Tandon was entrusted with the task. *PAI UP*, No. 4/1941, 17–24 January, p. 2; and No. 5/1941, 24–31 January, p. 2.

against Gandhi's instructions that "Congress funds need not be kept secretly. If the Government chooses to confiscate them, they may do so. In this life-and-death struggle, we must be prepared to lose all funds and other property"[52] seemed to make little difference. Indeed, in an effort to evade the heavy hand of governmental repression, many such devices were resorted to. For instance, when the authorities began to arrest prospective *satyagrahis* even before they could make their anti-war speeches, the *satyagrahis* went into hiding after giving notice, surfacing only at the time they were to offer *satyagraha*.[53]

With the arrest of most of the prominent district and town-level Congress leaders, the initiative for Congress activity outside the jails passed into the hands of Congress Socialists. Members of that party had expressed their reservations about Individual Satyagraha[54] by staying out of the movement. Leaders like Mohanlal Gautam and Acharya Narendra Dev now had virtual control of the PCC in the province. Though this did entail their providing the wherewithal for the continuance of Individual Satyagraha, it gave them the opportunity to project their own brand of nationalist activity, that is, a movement around agrarian issues.[55]

Thus in the period December 1940–January 1941, Acharya Narendra Dev, Mohanlal Gautam and others involved themselves in organizing the sugar cane growers of Gorakhpur—thereby picking up the threads which had been over-looked after Nehru's arrest. They hoped thus to be able to give a radical reorientation to the Congress programme.[56] However, their plans were soon nipped in the bud by the government, which felt that at a time when the Congress movement was on the wane, it was dangerous to allow such activities which could facilitate an enlargement of the movement. Both Acharya Narendra Dev and Mohanlal Gautam

[52] Gandhi's "Instructions to Satyagrahis", *CWMG*, Vol. 73, p. 158.

[53] *PAI UP*, No. 3/1941, 10–17 January, p. 1; No. 4/1941, 17–24 January, p. 1; No. 5/1941, 24–31 January, p. 1.

[54] This scepticism was because of the CSP leaders' contention that the movement was too narrow in scope and that the issue should not be freedom of speech but freedom for the country, for which selective *satyagraha* should be replaced by mass *satyagraha*. See account of Jayaprakash Narayan's meeting with Gandhi at Wardha, *The Pioneer*, 18 January 1941, p. 1.

[55] *PAI UP*, No. 1/1941, 27 December–3 January, p. 3.

[56] *PAI UP*, No. 3/1941, 10–17 January, p. 3.

were arrested under Section 107 Cr. P.C. in January 1941[57] and, though their work in Gorakhpur was sustained for some time by others such as Swami Bhagwan and Ramendra Varma, their hopes of transforming the Gandhian movement into a more revolutionary one were dashed to the ground.[58]

Preparations for the third phase of the Individual Satyagraha Movement which commenced on 17 February, were fairly smooth with Gandhi approving the entire initial list of 12,000 satyagrahis drawn up for this stage.[59] He insisted, however, that all potential *satyagrahis* must spin the *charkha* regularly.[60] There seemed to be no dearth of *satyagrahis* either and it was reported that neither coercion nor inducement had been used to obtain volunteers in the province.[61] However, those intending to perform *satyagraha* wanted to beat the government policy of preventive arrest by going into hiding after giving notice of *satyagraha*. This was widely resorted to, despite Gandhi's disapproval of such methods as going against the true spirit of satyagraha. At this time the AICC, in an attempt to regulate the movement, had issued detailed instructions to the PCCs and DCCs asking those resisters who had been fined to continue their *satyagraha* without issuing fresh notices; strictly forbidding the tempting practice of bringing rural *satyagrahis* into towns for courting arrest; placing a ban on picketing, though house to house propaganda by *satyagrahis* was permitted.[62]

It was in this phase that punitive fines were imposed on *satyagrahis* with some success. Instructions were issued that, for the realization of these fines, moveable property could be attached, but immovable property would remain untouched.[63] Western UP was more active in this phase. Weekly figures for total numbers courting arrest were impressive—averaging a thousand or more

[57] *Ibid*., p. 9.

[58] *PAI UP*, No. 4/1941, 17–24 January, p. 3; *PAI UP*, No. 7/1941, 1–7 February, p. 2.

[59] *PAI UP*, No. 8/1941, 7–14, February, p. 7.

[60] *The Pioneer*, 21 February 1941, reported that at least two prospective satyagrahis had been debarred from *satyagraha* because they did not spin regularly.

[61] *Ibid*.

[62] *PAI UP*, No. 13/1941, 14–21 March, p. 28.

[63] *PAI UP*, No. 10/1941, 21–28 February, p. 15. See also J.B. Kripalani's circular to all PCCs, *The Pioneer*, 6 March 1941, p. 8.

in March 1941.[64] Indeed, in the last week of the month, 2,000 resisters courted arrest.[65]

This impressive response to the movement was enough to cause some loss of morale in official circles. It was reported that at the district level, though there were no cases of "failure to carry out orders" against Congress activists, "there is no doubt that many officers consider it unwise to show unnecessary zeal in combating the movement".[66] Whether this was due to latent sympathies for the Congress or because of the dilemma posed by the nature of Gandhi's campaign is uncertain.

By pre-emptive arrests, by imposing stiff penalties on newspapers and by preventing the use of the post and telegraph department by Congressmen for transmitting *satyagraha* instructions, the British Government was indeed able to prevent any large-scale build-up of popular ferment. But it was by no means able to crush sympathy for the movement. In a province like the UP, this was revealed in several small but significant ways.

We shall take the case of the UP Provincial Press Advisory Committee formed after the Delhi Agreement between the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference and the Government of India in December 1940.[67] Under the agreement the latter agreed to withdraw the tight restrictions imposed on the press regarding coverage of *satyagraha* news, provided the former agreed to conduct themselves in a manner that would not hamper the smooth conduct of the war effort. Press Advisory Committees were constituted both at the Centre and in the various provinces. While the Viceroy and the Governors of Madras and Bombay expressed complete satisfaction with the functioning of their respective committees, the Governor of the UP complained that the UP committee showed pro-Congress leanings. It not only rode roughshod over the wishes of the government but failed to chide newspapers like *The National*

[64] *PAI UP*, No. 13/1941, 14–21 March, p. 27 and No. 14/1941, 21–28 March, p. 31.

[65] *PAI UP*, No. 15/1941, 28 March–4 April, p. 35.

[66] *Home Poll*, 18/4/41, FR UP i. See also Hallett's note on the Satyagraha Movement, 22 April 1941: "...my Chief Secretary takes the view that the action taken in some districts is not satisfactory and that this may be due to fear of Congress...." The Inspector-General of Police expressed similar fears. *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/104, p. 60.

[67] *The Pioneer*, 7 December 1940, p. 8.

Herald for their so-called "defeatist writings".[68] Doubtless the towering presence of Rama Rao, editor of *The National Herald* and a close associate of Jawaharlal Nehru, had much to do with the recalcitrance of this body. That the UP Press Advisory Committee adopted a softer line towards the Congress than its other counterparts else where may have been not only due to the pro-Congress feeling in that province but also in reaction to the inordinate harshness of the Hallett administration towards the nationalists, aided and abetted by the Chief Secretary, R.F. Mudie.

Another indication of the generalized sympathy for the Congress government was the steady flow of funds into the Congress coffers in late 1940–early 1941. While Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, the ace fundraiser for the Congress, was reported to have been able to raise a "few thousands", even those who were clearly loyalist, for example, the Nawab of Chhatari, were making contributions to the Congress.[69] By June 1941 it was reported that most of the funds for provincial Congress work were being received from Benares where the Maharajkumar of Vizianagram was providing substantial financial assistance.[70] Thus, it seemed as if, despite the oft-proclaimed pro-war spirit in the province, the Congress cause was also popularly perceived as a just one—even by those who stood on the fringes of the national movement.

A third pointer to the favourable response that the Individual Satyagraha campaign received in the UP was the sheer numerical strength of those willing to offer *satyagraha*. Figures for the arrest of *satyagrahis* in March 1941 reveal that the UP with an impressive tally of 6,328 arrests was ahead of other provinces.[71] The people seemed to be in a jail-going mood. Through the third and final

[68] Letter from R.F. Mudie, Chief Secretary, 28 June 1941, *Home Poll*, 3/27/41, p. 5.

[69] *Home Poll*, 3/33/40, IB Secret report dated 13 November 40 on Congress funds, p. 20.

[70] *Ibid*. His contribution was Rs 10,000. See also *PAI UP*, No. 24/1941, 1–6 June, p. 80.

[71] *AICC*/C-37(Part I)/1941, p. 1. The figures for the other states were as follows:

Andhra	1221	Bombay	70
Bengal	50	Gujarat	535
Bihar	262	Tamil Nadu	424

stages of the movement, even when other provinces reported shortage of *satyagrahis*, the UP maintained a steady trickle of volunteers for the movement. And while in provinces like Punjab and the NWFP, the practice of ignoring *satyagrahis* by refusing to arrest them was said to be fairly effective as early as in December 1940, the Governor of the UP did not feel confident about experimenting with this method until much later, that is, in mid-April 1941.[72] As he put it, the policy may work well in provinces where the Congress had but a toehold and where strong alternative parties existed, but in a province like the UP where the Congress enjoyed great credibility, such a policy could be counterproductive and might be interpreted as a weakening of government's resolve.

The fourth phase of the Individual Satyagraha Movement began, as scheduled, on 5 April 1941, though in the first few weeks there was some overlapping with remaining *satyagrahis* from the previous phase completing their *satyagraha*.[73] In this final phase, all four-anna Congress members were to court arrest. It was reported that arrangements for this phase were less complete than in the previous phases partly, no doubt, due to the crackdown on the organization by the government. Lists of *satyagrahis* were yet being sent for Gandhi's approval in late April and May 1941.[74] The availability of volunteers was greatest in Allahabad and Kanpur districts, though a significant development was the enthusiastic response from the Kumaun division, especially in the concluding months of this phase.[75]

Intelligence sources made contradictory assessments of the response of ordinary Congressmen to the movement in this phase. While on the one hand maintaining that four-anna Congress members were by and large unenthusiastic about the movement,

[72] See Hallett to Linlithgow, 7 February 1941, p. 20 and 23 March 1941, p. 46, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/104.

[73] *PAI UP*, No. 17/1941, 11–18 April, p. 46 and No. 19/1941, 25 April–2 May, p. 55.

[74] *PAI UP*, No. 15/1941, 28 March–4 April, p. 36 and No. 16/1941, 4–11 April, p. 42.

[75] *PAI UP*, No. 15/1941, 28 March–4 April, p. 36; No. 25/1941, 6–13 June, p. 85; No. 26/1941, 13–20 June, p. 89; No. 32/1941, 25 July–1 August 1941, p. 117; No. 33/1941, 1–8 August, p. 121; No. 35/1941, 15–22 August, p. 129; and No. 36/1941, 22–29 August, p. 133.

they were also seeking to provide reasons for the willingness of so many to offer *satyagraha*. Among the reasons identified were: (*a*) the belief that soon the government and the Congress would arrive at a compromise and those who had courted arrest would be suitably rewarded; (*b*) for the poorer sections of society, life in jail was more comfortable than life outside it; (*c*) peasants in the rural areas saw in going to jail a convenient pretext to evade payment of rent and revenue.[76] The effort was obviously on to prove that opportunism rather than selfless nationalism motivated the *satyagrahis*. Yet what had to be conceded was that sustained governmental repression had not acted as much of a dampener on the movement.[77]

However, this did not lead the government to give up its repressive strategy. Perhaps the non-availability of any other effective device to thwart the Individual Satyagraha Movement prompted it to continue with the arrests of the organizers of the movement.[78] Searches of the PCC office at Lucknow and the AICC office at Allahabad, besides district-level Congress units, were conducted in late April 1941 and those running these offices were arrested.[79] Provincial Congress work was reported to have been totally paralyzed by the raid on its headquarters. Henceforth it was decided that only a dummy office of the PCC would be maintained at Lucknow and that actual provincial Congress work would be carried out from Allahabad where students of the Kashi Vidyapith volunteered to look after the work of the office.[80]

As observed earlier in this chapter, the practices of ignoring *satyagrahis*, of selective arrests and, finally, of premature release of activists were adopted rather late in the UP.[81] In April–May 1941, these strategies were being tried out, with mixed results. Those *satyagrahis* who had not been arrested proceeded, under

[76] *PAI UP*, No. 15/1941, p. 36.

[77] For instance, in mid-April 1941, police sources commented that it was "still impossible to trace any consistent connection between districts where action had been strongest and where the movement is at its lowest ebb". *PAI UP*, No. 17/1941, 11–18 April, p. 15.

[78] *PAI UP*, No. 15/1941, 28 March–4 April, p. 36.

[79] *PAI UP*, No. 17/1941, 11–18 April, p. 45.

[80] *PAI UP*, No. 19/1941, 25 April–2 May, p. 56 and No. 21/1941, 9–16 May, p. 67.

[81] *PAI UP*, No. 19/1941, p. 56.

instructions from Gandhi, to march towards Delhi, offering *satyagraha* on the way until they were arrested.[82] The premature release of s*atyagrahis* was apparently part of an effort to relieve jail congestion but at least in one district it turned counterproductive, since these releases were viewed as a sign of weakening on the part of the government.[83]

As the weekly tally of *satyagrahis* in the UP began to decrease, from 500 in mid-May to 300 in late May and 200 in early June,[84] many a query was raised as to whether Gandhi would now call off the movement. Almost as if in answer to these questions the Mahatma released two press articles wherein he stated that he had no intention of calling off the movement and that the struggle could even continue for five years.[85]

Within two months, however, a change of mood was evident. By early August 1941 it was reported from the UP that there was a "growing restlessness among Congress leaders in jail in this Province".[86] There seemed to be a generalized feeling that *satyagraha* should now be suspended, partly because of the seriousness of the war situation, and partly due to a growing conviction that the movement had lost its vitality. On 21 July, plans to expand the Viceroy's Executive Council and the formation of a National Defence Council had been announced. Gandhi had displayed complete indifference to these moves and stated that "the announcement does not affect the stand taken by the Congress; nor does it meet the Congress demand to any extent".[87]

In mid-September, a Satyagraha Sanchalaks' Conference was held in Allahabad to review the progress of the movement. At this conference there seemed to be unanimity on the question of continuing with the campaign. The discussions revolved around how fresh life could be infused into the movement.[88] The need to raise more funds for the PCC was also discussed. Significantly it was

[82] *PAI UP*, No. 17/1941, 11–18 April, p. 45.

[83] This was particularly noted in the case of Ballia District. *PAI UP*, No. 24/1941, 1–6 June, p. 79.

[84] *PAI UP*, No. 22/1941, 16–23 May, p. 71; No. 23/1941, 23–30 May, p. 75; and No. 24/1941, 1–6 June, p. 79.

[85] Statement to the Press, 6 July 1941, p. 141. *CWMG*, Vol. 74, pp. 149–50.

[86] *PAI UP*, No. 33/1941, 1–8 August, p. 121.

[87] *CWMG*, Vol. 74, pp. 180–81. Interview to *The Hindu*, 22 July 1941.

[88] *PAI UP*, No. 39/1941, 10–17 September, p. 148.

decided to resume some normal Congress activities such as enrolment of four-anna members and celebration of Gandhi Jayanti Week with meetings, processions and sale of *khaddar*.[89]

Thus the Individual Satyagraha Movement in the UP plodded on through the uncertain months of September and October, the numbers offering *satyagraha* having dwindled to 25 or less per week.[90] On 17 October 1941, it entered its second year. And then, in early November 1941, there was even a slight revival of the movement with 48 cases of *satyagraha*.[91] The average of 20 *satyagrahis* per week was maintained throughout November as well.

In the UP, therefore, the crackdown on the organizers of the movement had to be continued until much later than in other provinces. Repeated efforts on the part of the government to strike at the roots of the movement by arresting local organizers and province-level dictators came to naught as new leaders came forward to replace those arrested. The process seemed to be unending.[92]

Meanwhile, at the all-India level, reservations were being expressed in Congress circles about the effectiveness of Gandhi's Individual Satyagraha campaign. A Working Committee meeting was held to deliberate on this issue on 19 October. All such members as were out of jail attended this meeting held at Wardha. On the following day the Working Committee members met with

[89] *Ibid*.

[90] *PAI UP*, Nos 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44/1941, for the months of September and October.

[91] *PAI UP*, No. 45/1941, 1–7 November, p. 171.

[92] For instance, at the provincial level, K.D. Malaviya was the organizer in late July 1941. He had been arrested by the end of the month, as also Purnima Banerji, who had been nominated his successor. She was succeeded by Professor Ram Saran of Moradabad. He in turn was followed by Professor Radhe Shyam of the Benares Hindu University (BHU), who spent most of his time in hiding to evade arrest. By late October the responsibility had been shifted on to the shoulders of Lal Behari Tandon, an MLA, who was, however, soon arrested. By late December, at the time of the Bardoli resolution withdrawing Individual Satyagraha, Mohanlal Saksena was the acting President of the UPCC. *PAI UP*, No. 31/1941, 18–25 July, p. 113; No. 32/1941, 25 July–1 August, p. 117; No. 33/1941, 1–8 August, p. 121; No. 35/1941, 15–22 August, p. 130; No. 39/1941, 10–17 September, p. 148; No. 45/1941, 1–7 November, p. 171; and No. 51/1941, for week ending 2 January 1942, p. 201.

Congress legislature party leaders. At these sessions doubts were expressed about the usefulness of prolonging the *satyagraha*, some even wondered whether non-violence was effective in practical politics and the prevalent feeling that the Individual Satyagraha Movement was "all but a failure" led to a request that Gandhi revise the whole programme.[93] However, Gandhi's response to all this was: "To give up Civil Disobedience would be folly. Civil Disobedience is itself completely non-violent action" and hence "every released satyagrahi should re-offer satyagraha within one week".[94]

There seemed to be a change of heart on the part of the Government, however. On 27 October 1941 the release of certain detenus from the Vellore Central Jail was announced and these releases took place on 1 November. In the UP, leaders like G.B. Pant and Vijayalakshmi Pandit were also released at this time. Hectic parleys between these leaders and those still in jail, notably Jawaharlal Nehru, took place. Doubtless, Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union and the precarious position of the Allies had once again caused ripples in Congress circles and occasioned some uneasiness about uncompromising opposition to the war effort.[95] These misgivings were, however, not shared by Gandhi, who declared that he was not greatly impressed by the change in the government's policy. He had no fresh advice to offer to the Congress and stated that his stand remained the same as on 21 October 1941.[96]

Whitehall's desire to placate the Congress was further evident in the declaration by the Government of India on 3 December 1941 that all Civil Disobedience prisoners whose offences had been of a formal or symbolic nature would be released.[97] On the following day, Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad were released. Gandhi called for a meeting of the AICC and Working Committee to decide on the future of the Individual Satyagraha Movement. In the

[93] Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, 1935–47, pp. 281–82.

[94] *Ibid*.

[95] *PAI UP*, No. 48/1941, 21–28 November, p. 186. Rajagopalachari was even willing to explore the possibilities of Congress cooperation in the British war effort. See Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, p. 283.

[96] Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, p. 283.

[97] Draft of statement on release of prisoners, cited in Linlithgow's note to Amery, 27 November 1941, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/21, p. 462.

meantime, however, civil disobedience was to continue, though he advised that those *satyagrahis* who had been released should not re-offer *satyagraha* immediately but concentrate instead on holding and attending meetings as well as making speeches.[98]

Meanwhile, a meeting of the Congress UP Legislature Party was held on 6–7 December in Lucknow. Though Pandit Pant presided over the meeting, the pace was set by Jawaharlal Nehru who categorically ruled out any prospect of Congress returning to office saying that "no good results could be achieved by parliamentary activities in present circumstances".[99] Government attempts to revive legislative institutions were condemned. Sympathy was expressed for Russia and China, but this did not imply a change in the Congress perception of British policy in India, as being imperialistic and anti-Indian in nature.

Yet, at the Bardoli session of the Congress Working Committee, held from 25–30 December 1941, members were at variance with Gandhi's views. Once again they visualized cooperation in the war if India were to be granted full independence. As before, Gandhi could not accept this giving up of non-violence and, for this reason, the Working Committee repeated its earlier action of relieving him of the responsibility of leading the Congress in the ensuing period. The most significant part of the Congress resolution at Bardoli was:

> While there has been no change in Britain's policy towards India the Working Committee must nevertheless take into full consideration the new world situation that has arisen by the development of the war into a world conflict and its approach to India. The sympathies of the Congress must inevitably be with the peoples who are the subject of aggression...but only a free and Independent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis....[100]

Thus ended the Individual Satyagraha campaign, Gandhi's least spectacular movement,[101] which figures in few histories of the

[98] Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, p. 288.

[99] *PAI UP*, No. 49/1941, 28 November–5 December, p. 192.

[100] Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the INC*, Vol. 2, p. 292.

[101] "It was never expected that it would create an appreciable impression on the war effort but it was a moral and from that standpoint a grand protest

Congress. Despite the strict instructions given by Gandhi on how to conduct the movement, participants had bent the rules, if not actually broken them, in an attempt to make it more sensational. Yet this limited campaign, launched, as Gandhi himself had observed, to keep the Congress from extinction, was not wholly devoid of significance. In the first instance it defeated the Government of India at its own game of "crushing the Congress" in the event of a Civil Disobedience Movement during the war. Moreover it fulfilled, if not wholly, at least partially, the expectations of those who had been pressing for a movement, ever since the resignation of the Congress ministries in November 1939. For, there is no denying the fact that, in the late 1939–41 period, the Indian people were mentally prepared for a mass movement. The activities of the Congress such as the formation of *Satyagraha Samitis* after the Ramgarh session in 1940, had increased the preparedness.

While the Individual Satyagraha campaign did generate mass enthusiasm, especially in the UP, its failure lay in its inability to carry certain sections of the Congress with it. Given the disillusionment with the Gandhian ideology and its tenets among certain groups of Congressmen in the 1930s, this was bound to happen. Strangely enough, the Left was divided on the issue. While the CSP, the Subhashites and the Communists criticized the Individual Satyagraha Movement for not going far enough, the Royists felt that this was not the time for an anti-war resistance movement.[102]

Governmental repression did much to quell the movement. Fines, premature arrests and press restrictions had their effect. We have a few instances from the UP of *satyagrahis* apologizing to the authorities for participating in the movement and resolving not to

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against the conduct of the war in the name of the people. If it is not effective in terms of pressure on the British Government to surrender power to the Indian people and make the war a fight for freedom and democracy, it was not meant to be so. The movement did result in increased freedom of speech and free criticism against the war efforts of the Government." Report of the Congress General Secretary, 1940–46, A.M. Zaidi, *Story of Congress Pilgrimage*, Vol. 4, p. 30.

[102] See V.B. Karnik's remarks at discussion at All India Political Study Camp, Dehradun, May 1940. M.N. Roy et al., *Satyagraha and the Potentialities of the Congress*, Dehradun, 1941.

indulge in any such activities in the future.[103] But these were isolated instances. In some cases, as with Nehru's arrest and harsh sentence, repression helped to create enthusiasm for the movement. Besides, government intransigence and its unwillingness to make any substantial constitutional concessions at this time brought sympathy even from unlikely quarters. This is evident in the attitude of newspapers like *The Pioneer* which, though critical, even mocking, of the Individual Satyagraha campaign, did not spare the government either.[104] The effort of British policy makers to stall all constitutional advance in India on the grounds that the Congress was not sufficiently representative and that the Muslims could not see eye to eye with this party, in particular, came in for much criticism. While the all-India policy of the Government was itself reprehensible, the particularly autocratic style of functioning of the Hallett administration in the UP served to alienate sections of opinion in the province further. To that extent even traditional loyalists tended to sympathize with the Congress at this time, and this would explain their contribution to Congress funds, which has been noted earlier in this chapter.

What finally extinguished the movement, then, was the division of opinion in the Congress leadership on whether a Civil Disobedience campaign was appropriate in the context of a serious and ever-worsening war situation. As we have seen, by September 1941, debates and discussions on the future course of Congress

[103] One such case was reported from Lucknow where a 20-year old *satyagrahi* Kanhaiya Lal declared to the Lucknow Magistrate: "I am sorry for what I have done. I assure you that I shall not work for Congress again." *The Pioneer*, 9 February 1941, p. 4. Another was from Bhogpur, Dehradun, where a Dr Harikishan when tried for presiding over a *satyagraha* meeting, apologized and said that he was not a believer in *satyagraha* and was against uttering anti-war slogans. *The Pioneer*, 12 February 1941, p. 9. In Sultanpur one Badal Ahir denied that he had offered his name for *satyagraha* at all and declared that he did not wish to do anything against the interests of the government. *The Pioneer*, 26 February 1941, p. 4. In Hardoi, four individuals stated in court that their signatures had been obtained for satyagraha without their knowledge. *The Pioneer*, 24 March, 1941, p. 3.

[104] See, for instance, *The Pioneer*, 24 April 1941, p. 8 for a severe indictment of the Secretary of State, L.S. Amery, by the editor for the former's speeches in the House of Commons.

activity became frequent and the Individual Satyagraha Movement became just a part of the general Congress activity.

Towards Quit India

The year 1942 witnessed a new configuration in India on all fronts. On the war front, especially in the east, Britain's fortunes took a definite turn for the worse. Japan followed up its attack on Pearl Harbour with a steady advancement in South-East Asia. On 15 February, Singapore fell to the Japanese and by late February the Japanese were at the gates of Burma. By March 1942 India was caught between the steadily advancing Japanese forces in the east and the Germans in Iran. From the Axis point of view, a Japanese overrunning of India would mean control over a wide belt extending from the Pacific Ocean to the Mediterranean and on to the Atlantic.

The British had to make arrangements for the defence of India on the one hand and seek the involvement of larger sections of Indian public opinion in the war effort on the other. The former involved the bringing of foreign troops into India[105] (which became a contentious issue), increasing the military presence in sensitive border areas, construction of new aerodromes and roads for movement of troops and even dismantling of existing railway lines for their re-location in more vital areas.[106] There was also talk of adopting a scorched earth policy which would cause considerable distress to the local people.[107] And there were the much-publicized air-raid precautions, to be undertaken in practically all the urban areas. As will be seen later in this chapter, neither was the effort to involve Indians in the administration pursued sincerely, nor was the defence of India undertaken adequately.

[105] In April 1942, American troops were brought into India to help the British war effort.

[106] Statement by Sir Andrew Clow, Communications Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council on 15 November 1941, cited in *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 85.

[107] Such as the depriving of the people of East Bengal of boats, which were even required for house to house commuting. Gandhi in the *Harijan* of 3 May 1942 wrote "To deprive people in East Bengal of boats is like cutting off vital limbs". Cited in Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885–1947*, p. 393.

The year 1942 also brought acute foodgrain scarcity and rising prices in most parts of the country. Cases of looting of grain shops were reported from Madras as early as in January.[108] There were also greater demands on the people with war contributions and loans being extorted from them in various ways.[109] Of course, there was more employment available with the setting up of new defence-related construction projects.[110]

For the Congress, the year began with clarifications and discussions on the Bardoli resolution. The resolution was the outcome of a deeply-felt need to change Congress strategy. This was not merely because of the petering out of the Individual Satyagraha campaign, but also because of the changed situation on the war front—the heightened possibility of war reaching India's borders.[111] Gandhi and his methods were once again set aside for what was seen as a more pragmatic approach. As Acharya Narendra Dev put it: "Indian politics has been resumed for the moment from the realm of metaphysics."[112] But Gandhi's misgivings about the Bardoli resolution and consequent desire to be dissociated from the Congress

[108] There is a reference to this in Nehru's speech at Wardha on 18 January 1942, *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 79.

[109] To cite a small instance, sports firms supplying goods to schools and colleges were asked to donate 3 per cent of their income to the war fund. *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 99. District boards in the UP were pressurized to transfer substantial sums of money to war funds, notwithstanding attempts by Congress members on the boards to prevent this. For the case of Bulandshahar see *The National Herald*, 12 January 1942, p. 2.

[110] Labour was recruited from Gorakhpur for the construction of the Assam road, Hallett to Linlithgow, 16 April 1942, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/105, p. 36. Some 3,000 workers were also employed for the construction of two aerodromes near Allahabad and Hallett reported that the only discontentment was amongst "some coolies who could not be given work". Hallett to Linlithgow, 21 July 1942, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/105, p. 84.

[111] As Nehru put it, "the Bardoli resolution was made not to help war efforts but simply because the Congress thought that in these days of uncertainty and emergency when nobody knew what is in store for him tomorrow it was expedient that public leaders should remain outside jail to guide the masses to maintain internal peace and tranquility", Speech at Benares District Political Conference, *The National Herald*, 24 January 1942, p. 4.

[112] To Jawaharlal Nehru, 3 January 1942. Intercepted letters of Nehru forwarded by Stephenson, Secretary to the Governor of the UP to Laithwaite, P.S. to the Viceroy, 10 January 1942, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/105, pp. 1–2.

caused much anxiety, not only in Congress circles, but in the nation at large. Fears of the consequence of Gandhi's withdrawal from the movement at this juncture were compounded with the feeling that perhaps the Congress would lose much and gain little by making this offer to the British. The president of the UP Congress, S.K.D. Paliwal, was openly critical of the resolution:

> I am afraid, the Bardoli resolution is merely a repetition of Poona history all over again with all the havoc it is bound to create in the interval.[113]

Jawaharlal Nehru, in all his public speeches of early January, was at pains to show that there was no real break with Mahatma Gandhi. But it was Maulana Azad who, in his opening speech at the Wardha session of the AICC in mid-January 1942, resolved the dilemma:

> The vital factor in the situation is the British Government's attitude. I am sure that British statesmen would not change their attitude and the position will never arise when we shall be faced with the choice of cooperation in the war.[114]

He clarified that the Bardoli resolution was not a revoking of the Bombay resolution of September 1940. At this session, Mahatma Gandhi, in turn, clarified that he would not make the Bardoli resolution an issue for leaving the Congress.[115] Indeed the Wardha session of the AICC resulted in a closing of Congress ranks with even C. Rajagopalachari endorsing the official Bardoli resolution.

This clearing of the ground was essential before Congressmen could resume their day-to-day activities in the towns and villages. Indeed, life outside jail was full of challenges. As Gandhi put it, the question was no longer one of merely "resisting war effort". There were questions of "dealing with scarcity of food and clothing, looting and bread riots, etc., which would have to be faced".[116]

[113] *The National Herald*, 6 January 1942, p. 3.

[114] *The National Herald*, 16 January 1942, p. 1.

[115] "I wish to stop you from dividing the house by seeking a vote on this resolution. I do not want Congress to look ridiculous in the eyes of the world." Speech at AICC session, *CWMG*, Vol. 75, pp. 223–24.

[116] *CWMG*, Vol. 75, p. 213.

First of all, a defunct Congress apparatus had to be revived. In the UP, the PCC office had not been abandoned even in the most difficult days of 1941—students and professors of the Kashi Vidyapith had taken over its functioning. On 1 January 1942 they handed over charge to the UPCC staff.[117]

Renewal of contact with the people was a priority of the PCC in early 1942. On a previous occasion, that is, in 1936, the election campaign had been the means of reaching out to the people; now it was the war and its devastating impact on the lives of the Indian people. According to the UPCC resolution of January 1942:

> every single village will be visited by a worker in the area allotted to him. He will acquaint himself with the hardships and difficulties of villagers and will urge them on no account to give way to panic or uneasiness but to develop self-reliance and to look to themselves and their organization for help and support.[118]

Newspapers which were banned or which had their securities forfeited in the course of the Individual Satyagraha campaign, now resumed publication. On 18 January 1942, Gandhi announced his decision to resume publication of the *Harijan*, *Harijan Sevak* and *Harijanbandhu*. In the UP, the Agra-based *Sainik* resumed publication on 26 January.[119]

In the prevailing conditions of deprivation, the Gandhian constructive programme assumed a new relevance. There was an unprecedented rise in the demand for *khaddar*.[120] Even Nehru emphasized the importance of the constructive programme in his numerous speeches to the people of the UP and others at this time:

> You will not get food and clothes if you do not develop cottage and village industries. These have become a necessity. People

[117] *The National Herald*, 4 January 1942, p. 3.
[118] *The National Herald*, 11 January 1942, p. 8.
[119] *CWMG*, Vol. 75, p. 202; *The National Herald*, 20 January 1942, p. 3.
[120] *Khadi* workers asked Gandhi how they would tackle a situation in which "We are producing two lakhs of rupees worth of *khadi*, but the demand exceeds 12 lakhs". Gandhi's advice to *khadi* workers on or before 9 January 1942, *CWMG*, Vol. 75, p. 208.

> in towns may not be able to carry out this work fully, but you should do it as far as possible.[121]

Nehru's message to the people also had a note of urgency. The Indian people should not lose morale:

> Do not run away when villages and towns are being bombed, but help the victims and conduct them to safe places and face any eventuality courageously. Do not get panicky as it weakens our morale as it did in the case of Holland, Belgium and France which surrendered in spite of big armies.... Organize volunteers and other organizations.[122]

Thus, even while officials of the Government of India were lamenting over the "passivity" and "defeatism" of the Indian people, active organizational work was taking off in the province. On 5 February 1942, the UPCC issued instructions to all subordinate Congress committees outlining three main areas of activity: (*a*) maintenance of the public peace; (*b*) relief of economic distress; and (*c*) service in emergency.[123] Of course, the underlying assumption in all this was that Britain could not be relied upon to defend India adequately.[124]

The post-Bardoli resolution days also saw the revival of local movements which had been in suspended animation in the province during the Individual Satyagraha Movement, such as the cane-growers' agitation in Gorakhpur.[125] This caused considerable

[121] Speech at Benares Political Conference, 23 January 1942, *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 88.

[122] Address at Gandhi Chowk, Wardha, 18 January 1942, *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 79.

[123] *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 117.

[124] "This imperialism is in a dilemma and is reduced to such a state that the British cannot protect their own imperialism. You know that their Empire was not organized before the outbreak of the war. They are not strong enough to guard it and save it." Nehru at Gorakhpur, 31 January 1942, *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 105.

[125] The District Magistrate of Gorakhpur reported that the release of prisoners had resulted in a serious increase of agrarian agitation particularly among the sugarcane growers. Hallett to Linlithgow, 19 January 1942, *Linlithgow Papers*, 125/105.

dismay to the Hallett administration, which felt that the decision to release *satyagrahis* had not been a very wise one in any case. What it was particularly worried about was the impact of these releases on the district administration: while on the one hand there would be renewed Congress interference in war-related activities, there would also be a resurgence of anti-British propaganda and demoralizing rhetoric on the other. The speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru, for instance, were reportedly making the task of the district administration "a hundred times more difficult" since it was spreading "defeatism".[126] Thus, in the UP, the Congress and the government were set on a collision course even in early 1942—well before the outbreak of the Quit India Movement. This was in spite of the fact that the UP government had delayed the release of many Congressmen of a radical hue—leaders like H.D. Malaviya, Mohanlal Gautam, K.M. Ashraf, Z.A. Ahmed, R.D. Bharadwaj, Balagangadhar Tripathi and Jharkhande Rai continued to remain behind bars in March 1942.[127] Fresh arrests were launched by the government in March 1942 and among those arrested were Congress MLAs.[128]

Meanwhile, the war continued to unfold scenes of horror and deprivation before the Indian people. Those living in Bengal, Bihar and the UP witnessed the daily influx of refugees from Burma, whose tales of British indifference to their plight reminded the Indians of their subordinate status.[129] In fact, the problem was not just one of British indifference but of senseless and brutal atrocities committed by troops stationed in India. In March 1942, Gandhi reported that several instances of troops' misbehaviour with women and open looting, especially of stalls in railway stations, had come to his notice. A particularly gruesome incident was reported to Gandhi by the Secretary of the Marwari Relief Society:

[126] Hallett to Linlithgow, 17 February 1942, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/105, p. 17.

[127] *The National Herald*, 3 February 1942, p. 4 and 11 March 1942, p. 5. However, by April 1942 the Communists were released in recognition of their new position on the war.

[128] Namely Ram Kumar Shastri of Basti and Jata Shankar Shukla of Unnao. *The National Herald*, 15 March 1942, p. 4.

[129] See Jawaharlal Nehru's Press statement on racial discrimination in evacuation, 18 March 1942, *SWJN*, Vol. 12, pp. 167–68.

> On the night of the 14th March, shortly after the arrival of the Chittagong Mail, as I, in company with a number of volunteers, was attending to the wants of the evacuees a British tommy got hold of a small child belonging to one of the poor evacuees and threw it under the train.... I reported the matter to the station military authorities, but their attitude was anything but sympathetic....[130]

Such behaviour would certainly have alienated the Indians from British rule.

But what affected the people most, especially in the towns of the UP, was the acute foodgrains scarcity. By mid-March 1942, there was no wheat or rice in the markets of Lucknow—nor was there any hope of a respite for a further two months, until the new harvest arrived in the markets. The situation was no better elsewhere. "Acute wheat famine—not even a rupee worth of wheat available anywhere" was the news from Dehradun in *The National Herald* of 11 March 1942. The Lucknow CCC even feared "bread riots". The UPCC had constituted a committee to go into the question of food-grain scarcity. It attributed the prevailing situation to three factors: (*a*) exports of foodstuff outside India; (*b*) large government purchases for military requirements; and (*c*) speculative activities of middlemen.[131] While the first two problems could only be solved by the government, the Congress tried to tackle grain speculation by holding meetings with grain dealers at *mandis* and trying to persuade them not to take undue advantage of the situation.[132] As for the UP government, while organizing some police raids and initiating punitive action against some hoarders, it tended to minimize the problem, referring to an "alleged grain scarcity" in its reports.[133] The government's ban on the transfer of food commodities from one district to another only aggravated the situation especially in districts like Lucknow which had always been dependent on outside sources of grain.

While constructive activity, civil defence preparations and routine political work like the holding of district political conferences

[130] *CWMG*, Vol. 75, p. 420.
[131] *The National Herald*, 10 March 1942, p. 3.
[132] *The National Herald*, 9 March 1942, p. 4.
[133] *Home Poll*, 18/4/42, FR UP i.

constituted the bulk of Congress effort at this time, most of the prominent Congressmen of the province dwelt on one theme in their speeches. India, they pointed out, had been rendered defenceless by imperialism. British mistrust of Indians on the one hand and a singular lack of commitment to India's defence on the part of Britain on the other had done incalculable harm. G.B. Pant spoke of the "culpable dilatoriness" of the British Government, which was "simply fiddling while there was blazing fire all around".[134] Purshottamdas Tandon was sharply critical of British officialdom:

> Outwardly there was an official cry for help in the war effort but in fact it was the British bureaucracy that was preventing all real efforts on the part of the people of India.

He compared the performance of the British in Malaya and Burma with that of the Chinese nation, which could resist the Japanese invasion for four years because it was a struggle of the people.[135] Mohanlal Saksena pointed an accusing finger at the "Amerys and Linlithgows" who had brought about the catastrophes in the Far East.[136] Also evident in these speeches was a confidence that India, granted independence, could perform wonders: "National freedom would...have marvelous effects".[137]

It was into this political climate that Sir Stafford Cripps stepped in. There were great expectations from this man, whom most Indians held in high esteem.[138] However, the Cripps Mission was neither supported by the British in India nor was the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, too enthusiastic about it.[139] It had been pushed through largely because of American pressure and at the

[134] *The National Herald*, 18 March 1942, p. 3.

[135] *The National Herald*, 7 March 1942, p. 5.

[136] *The National Herald*, 16 March 1942, p. 1.

[137] G.B. Pant in his speech at Nainital District Political Conference, *The National Herald*, 18 March 1942, p. 3.

[138] G.B. Pant referred to Cripps as "the reputed man of vision and courage", speech made at the Nainital District Political Conference, *Ibid.*

[139] The Viceroy was of the view that the government should stand firm by the August Proposals and "make no further move". Churchill had cabled to Attlee from Washington on 7 January about the "danger" of "making constitutional changes, in India at a moment when enemy is upon the frontier". R.J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India*, Oxford, 1979, pp. 51–54.

behest of Clement Attlee and the Labour Party. The Draft Declaration brought by Sir Stafford Cripps stated that concrete steps towards full self-government could be taken only after the war, when a constitution-making body would be elected. The British Government would implement the constitution drawn up by this body but any province of British India that was not prepared to accept the new constitution could "retain its present constitutional position". In the words of Gandhi's biographer, B.R. Nanda, this controversial clause had the potential of converting India "into a political chequerboard containing scores of 'independent states' which could make short work of India as a political and economic entity".[140] It also practically conceded the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan. Consequently, the Congress rejected the Cripps proposals. Gandhi described them as "too ridiculous to find acceptance anywhere".[141] And as the Chief Secretary of the UP remarked, perhaps not without some satisfaction, "One permanent effect of the British Government's offer...will probably be an increase in estrangement between the two major communities".[142]

The estrangement was not only between the two major communities—the Cripps Mission also widened the rift between the Congress and the British Government. What was particularly galling was the latter's refusal to entertain Congress proposals for Indian control of defence arrangements.[143] Nehru summed up the post-Cripps mood of the Congress in the following words:

> From our side there are going to be no approaches to the British Government, for we know that whoever comes from them

[140] B.R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography*, p. 451.

[141] *CWMG*, Vol. 76, p. 28.

[142] *Home Poll*, 18/4/42, FR UP i.

[143] The War Cabinet's proposals declared: "During the critical period which now faces India and until the new Constitution can be framed H.M.'s government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain the control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort". Appendix VI, *CWMG*, Vol. 75, p. 457.

Maulana Azad had emphasized the importance of effective control of defence by Indians in his talks with Cripps. The Congress Working Committee attached great importance to the need to transfer responsibility for defence to Indians. In fact, in the words of S. Gopal, "The Congress would have reached a settlement with Cripps if the arrangements for defence had been satisfactory", S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol. 1, p. 280.

> speaks in the same accent as of old and treats us in the same way.[144]

In the words of an Indian observer, the country was in a state of "high political tension" after the breakdown of the Cripps Mission.[145] The urgency of the situation was heightened by the Japanese attack on Ceylon on 5 April. This was followed by bombings of Vishakapatnam, Kakinada and Chittagong cities on the eastern coast of India. A Japanese attack on India seemed certain. Declining faith in the government was reflected in the run on savings banks in the UP.[146] Fearing bomb attacks, there was an exodus from the cities to the rural areas.[147] Increased scarcity of grain and salt as well as the rising prices of foodstuffs heightened the sense of distress.[148] There was reportedly a general reluctance on the part of cultivators to bring foodgrain to the market and speculators were hiding stocks of grain in anticipation of a further increase in prices.[149] Collections of revenue were also rather low, indicating a general uncertainty about the survival of the state.

The Congress Working Committee met at Allahabad on 27 April 1942 to take stock of the situation following the departure of the Cripps Mission. Gandhi did not attend this meeting on the plea that he had prior engagements in Seogaon and was not in the best of health.[150] But there is enough evidence to indicate that Gandhi was not in tune with the Congress at this time. In a letter to S. Satyamurti he had written "I am helpless if the Congress policy changes from moment to moment".[151] While his commitment to

[144] Press statement at Allahabad, 15 April 1942, *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 234.

[145] Devdas Gandhi, ed., *India Unreconciled: A Documented History of the Indian Political Events from the Crisis of August 1942 to October 1943*, New Delhi, 1943, p. 19.

[146] Hallett to Linlithgow, 25 April 1947, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/105.

[147] In the UP the greatest exodus was from Kanpur. *Home Poll*, 18/4/42, FR UP i. There was an even larger exodus from Delhi.

[148] The Kanpur workers' cost of living index went up from 155 on 17 May 1942 to 165 on 7 June 1942. By 21 June it had risen to 179.3. Fortnightly reports from the UP for May and June 1942, *Home Poll*, 18/5/42 and 18/6/42, FR UP i and ii.

[149] *Home Poll*, 18/5/42, FR UP i.

[150] Letter to Nehru, 19 April 1942, *CWMG*, Vol. 76, p. 53.

[151] On 17 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 44.

non-violence was unflinching, he was particularly disturbed about Nehru's complete abandonment of *ahimsa*.[152]

Gandhi communicated his unhappiness over Nehru's positions to the man himself.[153] He also warned Patel, who was to attend the Working Committee meeting that "If they do not adopt any unambiguous resolution of non-violent non-cooperation, your duty will be to resign." Patel was also to "oppose the scorched earth policy and any suggestion to invite foreign troops".[154]

However, despite his absence from the session, Gandhi did send in his views in the form of a resolution through Mirabehn.[155] This draft was toned down by Rajendra Prasad before it was presented at the meeting. Yet, even in its modified form, it had a note of finality:

> The AICC is of opinion that Britain is incapable of defending India. It is natural that whatever she does is for her own defence. There is an eternal conflict between Indian and British interests.... Japan's quarrel is not with India.... If India were freed her first step would probably be to negotiate with Japan.[156]

Gandhi's resolution was significant for two reasons: (*a*) its tone of uncompromising hostility to the British set the mood for the Congress in the months to come; and (*b*) it showed that, for Gandhi at least, Japan was the lesser of the two evils. However, negotiation with Japan was not to be for India's surrender but to prevent an attack by Japan.

However, this point was not appreciated by most other Congress leaders. Jawaharlal Nehru felt that "If Bapu's approach is accepted we become passive partners of the Axis powers. This approach is

[152] On 13 April, in a letter to Patel, Gandhi remarked that Nehru's "speech reported today seems terrible". *CWMG*, Vol. 76, p. 31. The reference in all probability was to Nehru's Press statement on the Cripps Mission in which he had said: "May be we will have to take guerilla warfare". *SWJN*, Vol. 12, pp. 223–24.

[153] Letter to Nehru, 15 April 1942, in which he wrote: "Whereas we have always had differences of opinion it appears to me that now we also differ in practice.... I see no good in American troops entering India and in our resorting to guerilla warfare." *CWMG*, Vol. 76, p. 40.

[154] Letter to Patel, 22 April 1942, *CWMG*, Vol. 76, p. 61.

[155] Letter to Nehru, 24 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 66.

[156] *SWJN*, Vol. 12, pp. 276–85.

contrary to the Congress policy for the last two years and a half."[157] Rajagopalachari described the resolution as running "into the arms of Japan".[158] Even Acharya Kripalani remarked: "the whole thought and background of the draft is one of favouring Japan. It may not be conscious".[159]

As always, Jawaharlal Nehru offered a way out of the tangle by proposing an alternative draft in which some of the sharpness of the anti-British statements was toned down. The antipathy of Indians to Nazism and Fascism was reiterated. According to this resolution:

> The Committee repudiates the idea that freedom can come to India through interference or invasion by any foreign nation, whatever the professions of that nation may be.... The Committee would therefore expect the people of India to offer complete non-violent non-cooperation to the invading forces and not to render any assistance to them.[160]

Despite this, Mahatma Gandhi's draft managed to secure a majority vote. Among those who supported it were Acharya Narendra Dev, Achyut Patwardhan, Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel. Was this a reflection of the mood of the Congress or a belief that it was safer to be with Gandhi at this juncture? One is not certain. Finally, however, Nehru's amended resolution was passed after Maulana Azad requested the supporters of the Gandhi–Prasad resolution to accept Nehru's draft.[161]

The final outcome of the Working Committee deliberations was the adoption of the stand that "Not only the interests of India but also Britain's safety, and world peace and freedom demand that Britain must abandon her hold on India." The Committee expected the people of India to offer complete non-violent non-cooperation to the invading forces and not to render any assistance to them. The success of this policy would largely depend on the intensive working out of the Congress constructive programme.

[157] *Ibid*., pp. 286–92.
[158] *Ibid*.
[159] *Ibid*.
[160] *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 276–85.
[161] N. Mansergh and E.W.R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. 2, 30 April–21 September 1942, Lodon, 1971, p. 164.

May 1942 saw a sharp deterioration in relations between the British Government and the Congress. Gandhi's statements in the *Harijan* became more pithy and dramatic: "Leave India to God. If that is too much, then leave her to anarchy".[162] He also began to speak more definitely about a movement to be launched. The first reference was in an interview to Bombay Suburban and Gujarat Congressmen on 15 May 1942: "It will take two months for me to launch it [the fight]. And that is why I wish this talk with all of you today to be kept secret."[163] As for the nature of the movement, he was clear that it would not be Individual Satyagraha this time: "No, it will be mass *satyagraha*—an all-out *satyagraha* against the British demanding their withdrawal forthwith...".[164] It was as if Gandhi had received the divine message to start a movement.

The British authorities were also stiffening their stand. The Hallett administration's actions became more intolerant from day to day. In early May, instructions had been issued to all District Magistrates that the tolerance that was extended to the Congress in the hope that they might cooperate in the defence of their country was no longer justified.[165] This was the green signal to act against the Congress and what followed were searches of Congress offices,[166] restrictions on the Press[167] and arrests of prominent

[162] Interview to Bombay Suburban and Gujarat Congressmen, 15 May 1942, *CWMG*, Vol. 76, p. 109.

[163] *Ibid*.

[164] *Ibid*., p. 107.

[165] *Home Poll*, 18/5/42, FR UP i.

[166] On 10 May 1942 the Gorakhpur DCC office was searched, *The National Herald*, 11 May 1942, p. 3.

The National Herald of 24 May announced that all Congress meetings in Haldwani had been banned, p. 1. On 26 May 1942 the AICC office was raided by the police, *The National Herald*, 27 May 1942, p. 1.

[167] One of the first newspapers to be banned in the UP was the *Sainik* (Agra), for carrying a proscribed item. But the Government's real battle was with *The National Herald*. There was already a case against the paper for a news item on 24 August 1941 regarding an incident in the camp jail, which resulted in the editor, Mr K. Rama Rao being sentenced to 6 months in jail and a fine of Rs 750. *The National Herald*, 16 May 1942, p. 1. Some 10 days later, the newspaper's security of Rs 6,000 was forfeited. *The National Herald*, 27 May 1942. Even while protests against this action were being expressed in different parts of the country and money was being collected for a fresh security amount, the paper was asked to pay up Rs 12,000. *The National Herald*,

Congressmen like Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, S.K.D. Paliwal, President of the UPCC, Mahabir Tyagi, Maulana Husain Ahmed Madani and others.[168]

Repression was at its worst in the district of Gorakhpur. This district, "with its problems of over-population and consequent pressure on the land, of rural indebtedness and want of supplementary occupations and extreme poverty of the masses" had made the maximum contribution to the war effort. Lakhs of rupees had been sent to England "for purchasing bombers".[169] But the district was reportedly "seething with discontent"[170] because of the excesses of the District Magistrate E.V. Moss and his subordinates. Unscrupulous methods were being used to extort war contributions even from the poorest of the poor. Labour was also being forcibly recruited for the construction of roads in Assam.[171] Shibbanlal Saksena, one of the most important Gorakhpur leaders had been under continuous arrest since 19 August 1940. In April 1942, while still in jail, he was served an externment order, banning him from entering or residing in any district of the Gorakhpur and Benares Divisions.[172] On the agrarian front, while the cane growers' problem continued,[173] the Maharajganj *tahsil* of Gorakhpur was in tumult because of the large-scale eviction of tenants

4 June, 1942, p. 1. But those who ran the newspaper were undeterred even by this. A fresh collection drive was launched and an amazing number of contributions were received. See *The National Herald*, 9 June 1942, p. 1.

[168] On 12 May 1942 Kidwai was arrested under Rule 26 of the DIR. *The National Herald*, 13 May 1942, p. 1. On 2 June, Jagan Prasad Rawat, MLA of Agra and newly elected Secretary of the UPCC was arrested near Chauri Chaura. *The National Herald*, 3 June 1942, p. 3. On 5 June, Sri Krishna Dutt Paliwal was arrested. *The National Herald*, 6 June 1942, p. 1. The following day saw the arrest of Mahabir Tyagi. *The National Herald*, 7 June 1942, p. 1. *Hartals* followed the arrests, especially of Kidwai and Paliwal in Kanpur and other places.

[169] *The National Herald*, 19 May 1942, p. 5.

[170] *The National Herald*, 8 April 1942, p. 5; Rafi Ahmed Kidwai's statement on Gorakhpur, *The National Herald*, 10 April 1942, p. 3

[171] *The National Herald*, 10 April 1942, p. 3 Zamindars and millowners were being persuaded to supply labourers.

[172] *The National Herald*, 20 April 1942, p. 2.

[173] The sugar cane growers were demanding a minimum price of six and a quarter annas per *maund* of cane. The problem was also one of overproduction of sugar cane.

whose rights had been recently recorded.[174] Perhaps in an effort to make the Congress lose credibility, the Hallett government refused to annul sections 171 and 180 of the Act, in spite of repeated entreaties to do so.[175]

For a people already shocked by the British treatment of Indian refugees from Malaya and Burma, the news that in Almora the British were using the Defence of India Rules to reserve accommodation for White and European refugees, must have been highly provocative.[176] Equally disturbing was an item in the UP Gazette in mid-May that Indian civil defence magistrates in the cities of Benares and Lucknow were to be replaced by European officers, suggesting thereby that Indians could not be relied upon in these times of crisis.[177]

While the faith of the people in the British administration was being rudely shaken, there were clear indications that Congress credibility was on the upswing. Significant in this context is the UP Governor's account of a conversation with one of his senior Indian officials. The latter pointed out that Cripps had come to negotiate with the Congress "first and last". This had led to the feeling that

> Whatever the results of the war, Congress must and shall come into power over a large part of this land again. It is only natural that people of this belief should lose faith in the British and begin seriously to consider whether it would not be in their own interests and those of India at large to enter the Congress fold.[178]

By the end of May there was talk of Azad and Nehru being summoned to Seogaon for talks with Gandhi on his plans for the

[174] During the tenure of the Congress ministry, largely at the behest of Shibbanlal Saksena, some 30,000 acres of *farzi*, *sir* and *khudkasht* lands had been recorded in the tenants' name as being the rightful owners of the land. But after the resignation of the ministries, cases were filed against these tenants and they were sought to be evicted from the land. See Shibbanlal Saksena's letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, undated, *JN Papers*, Vol. 90, pp. 94–100.

[175] See footnote 111, Chapter 2.

[176] *The National Herald*, 21 April 1942, p. 4.

[177] *The National Herald*, 26 May 1942, p. 4.

[178] Hallett to Linlithgow, 16 June 1942, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/105, p. 69.

new movement.[179] The talks took place between the 10 and 15 June and, according to Gandhi:

> M. [Azad] is not satisfied with my demand or the manner of enforcement; he needs time for thought. J.L. not quite so dissatisfied as M. but not quite convinced either.[180]

Maulana Azad, in his *India Wins Freedom* states that it was on the question of resisting the Japanese that he had differed with Gandhi.[181] Nehru spoke of the "passion" in Gandhi's eyes and in his words "and I knew that that passion was the passion of India—the passion that is moving vast numbers of Indians today".[182] At a public meeting in Gorakhpur on 3 July 1942 he stated:

> Mahatma Gandhi is about to launch a satyagraha movement or is contemplating some other move to wrest independence and you should keep yourself in readiness.[183]

There were no elaborate preparations for this movement in the UP. Most Congressmen were too busy with civil defence measures. There were some feeble efforts to revive the volunteer force[184] but the vigour of the days of 1940 was clearly missing. In fact, the proposed Quit India Movement was to be an antithesis to the Individual Satyagraha Movement. It was as if the latter method had been discarded consciously and completely. This was reflected in Nehru's note on his conversations with Gandhi:

> The movement contemplated should be envisaged as a mass movement and there should be as few restrictions as possible on the people who wish to join it. Nor should any untoward

[179] *The National Herald*, 30 May 1942, p. 1.

[180] Letter to Amrit Kaur, 15 June 1942, *CWMG*, Vol. 76, p. 227.

[181] "The scheme I had in view was that as soon as the Japanese army reached Bengal and the British army withdrew towards Bihar, the Congress should step in and take over the control of the country.... I was surprised to find that Gandhiji did not agree with me.... It was his view that if the British left, the Japanese would not attack India. I could not accept his reading." Maulana Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, Madras, 1988, p. 74.

[182] *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 368.

[183] *Ibid.*, p. 382.

[184] *The National Herald*, 2 June 1942, p. 3.

> incidents leads to its suspension or withdrawal. The movement must aim at independence and be carried on till this is achieved.[185]

Gandhi's arrival at a position of asking the British to leave India and its endorsement by other Congress leaders was the final and exasperated reply of the Congress to the deviousness and insincerity of Britain's policy regarding India from September 1939 onwards. The deliberate attempt to belittle the Congress by making the paltriest of constitutional concessions to it on the one hand and the sparing of no effort to efface the Congress from the people's minds on the other[186] was only part of the story. Even while the Revolutionary Movements Ordinance, with its explicit motive of crushing the Congress was being devised, the Muslim League was being given every possible encouragement to articulate its demands.[187] Once it had done so, in the shape of the Pakistan demand, it became more convenient for the British to cite "differences among Indians" as the major hurdle to constitutional progress. Above all was the British commitment to a policy of stubborn immovability. The Viceroy was the greatest proponent of this policy.

While the Cripps proposals did represent the last straw, it had been anticipated to a great extent by Congress leaders even in January 1942.[188] What remained to be realized in the course of February, March, and April 1942 was Britain's lack of concern for its colonial subjects. The imperialist contradiction was fully revealed.

How prepared was the Congress in the UP for the Quit India Movement? In the absence of adequate material, any enquiry regarding this would be somewhat speculative. The non-availability of the *Police Abstracts of Intelligence* for 1942 makes the task more

[185] *SWJN*, Vol. 12, p. 362.

[186] This was done in several ways—by minimizing the achievements of the Congress ministries and highlighting its shortcomings and by small acts of discourtesy against Congress legislators, for example, the unceremonious removal of their belongings from the Council House to accommodate certain government departments in early 1942.

[187] See note of conversation between the Viceroy and Sir Sikander Hayat Khan on 25 January 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/9, p. 78. See also note of interview between the Viceroy and M.A. Jinnah on 6 February 1940, *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/9, p. 108.

[188] Maulana Azad's statement at the AICC Wardha Session, See footnote 114.

difficult. To add to this is the dearth of correspondence and private papers of Congress and other leaders (with some exceptions like those of Gandhi and Nehru). Even those who would have maintained a record of their correspondence in normal times, would have destroyed all incriminating documents in the troubled days of 1942. Preparations, if any, would be done in the utmost secrecy. Our only sources, then, are the interviews with prominent Congressmen of the UP and activists in the movement, and the government reports on Congress' responsibility for the disturbances in the Wickenden and Tottenham reports.[189]

Memories of 1942 were obviously somewhat dimmed by the time surviving participants were interviewed in 1986. Hence there could be some inaccuracies in the dates and months mentioned. Bearing all these limitations in mind, it is still important to mention what Congressmen from different parts of the province had to say. Raghupat Sharma, a district-level Congressman from Gonda stated that, in early 1942, pamphlets were already in circulation in his area instructing the people about the steps they should take—this time there would be no jail-going, participants were advised to remain hidden, to cut telegraph wires, etc.[190] Apparently, the Congress Socialists were largely responsible for these plans—and they were in all likelihood initiated by Acharya Narendra Dev. Chandroday Dikshit, a Lucknow-based CSP leader, refers to a letter from the Acharya to him and others in March 1942 suggesting that a movement on a much larger scale was being contemplated by Gandhi.[191] (It must be recalled that in those very days the Acharya

[189] R. Tottenham was the Additional Secretary, Home Department, Government of India. His Report, "Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances" was the accepted official document on the movement. While Tottenham was primarily concerned with implicating the Congress for the movement and even tried to prove that Gandhi was pro-Japanese, Wickenden's was a more impartial and well-researched report. T. Wickenden, ICS, a judge in the Central Provinces was selected by the Government of India in consultation with the British Government to prepare an independent report on the Quit India Movement, using intelligence reports, intercepted letters of prominent persons, speeches of Congress leaders and the writings and interviews of Mahatma Gandhi in the *Harijan*. This report is available in published form as P.N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement: British Secret Report* (henceforth *Quit India Movement*), Delhi, 1976.

[190] Interview with Raghupat Sharma at Lucknow, 21 April 1986.

[191] Interview with Chandroday Dikshit at Lucknow, 22 April 1986.

was in Gandhi's Ashram at Seogaon for medical treatment and would therefore have a better idea of his plans than many others.) We also have references to CSP training camps in Gorakhpur and Deoria in early 1942, though there is no record of the actual work done here.[192] Besides all this, there are also recollections of "some pencil-written notes" by Acharya Kripalani about the possibility of a movement at this time.[193]

The Wickenden Report suggests that the UP, along with Bihar and Delhi, were probably the best prepared regions in the country for the Quit India Movement.[194] Even Congress leaders perceived it to be so. Most of these preparations appear to have been made between the Working Committee meeting of 14 July and the Bombay session of the AICC in August. Much of this activity revolved around speeches given by Jawaharlal Nehru—to groups of revolutionaries,[195] (who were mentioned as having "offered themselves for any sort of work, including removal of railway lines, cutting telegraph wires and the like"[196]), to the UPCC EC (stating that "Everybody would be free to use his own weapons according to his choice. Revolutionaries could do as they pleased and also Kisans and labour leaders")[197] and to students of the Benares Hindu University.[198] Nehru was also reported to have organized a secret Congress volunteer corps in the province, similar to Asoka Mehta's People's Volunteer Brigade in Bombay.[199]

But there were other active Congressmen too—interestingly, most of them had Socialist connections. Dr Sampurnand, who had had differences with the Congress in November 1939 on the decision to resign from office, was now making preparations in Benares, which was to be an epicentre of the movement. Apparently he had a private meeting with Congress workers on 27 July where "the decision is said to have been taken that Congress

[192] Interview with Ram Dhari Shastri, a Deoria Congressman, Lucknow, 21 April 1986.

[193] Interview with Rameshwar Prasad Mishra, Lucknow, 23 April 1986.

[194] P.N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement*, p. 107.

[195] Sachindra Nath Sanyal refers to a private talk given by Nehru in a letter to Durga Das dated 1 August 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 55, 253.

[196] *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

[197] *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56, 242.

[198] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

[199] *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 255.

dictators would be appointed to control the movement in every district as far as possible".[200] Such dictators did emerge, if not for individual districts, then for the province as a whole. Thus the Tottenham Report mentions Keshav Dev Malaviya "the Congress Socialist leader who acted as Provincial 'dictator' in the UP during the opening phase of the movement".[201] He was succeeded by Acharya Jugal Kishore.

The much respected former Premier G.B. Pant, was reported to have addressed Congress workers in Kanpur on 19 July 1942 "and among other things told them every kind of mischief like the cutting of wires and demolition of bridges would take place in the movement". There are also references to "a general strike of every kind except of conveyances" and even "a no-rent campaign" in the same speech.[202] The Congress Socialist leaders, who were identified as working "in close association with Gandhi" were Rammanohar Lohia and Acharya Narendra Dev.[203] Another active leader, again with CSP connections, was Kamlapati Tripathi.

Meetings throughout the province were the norm at the end of July 1942. Students of Benares were addressed by several Congress leaders—Dr Sampurnanand, Kamlapati Tripathi, Acharya Kripalani, among others. Their professors were also received instructions from Congress leaders.[204] Raja Ram Shastri was asked to keep a batch of Kashi Vidyapith students in readiness by Balkrishna Keskar of the foreign department of the AICC. They would not plunge openly into the movement at the very start but would help him in organizing it afterwards.[205]

During this period district Congress workers frequently visited their headquarters to receive instructions.[206] For instance, on 25 July 1942 a meeting took place in Lucknow, which was attended by Congress officials from the neighbouring districts. It was addressed by Mohanlal Saksena and detailed instructions were issued such as:

[200] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[201] R. Tottenham, *Government of India: Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, 1942–43*, New Delhi, 1943, p. 37.

[202] P.N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement*, pp. 85, 242.

[203] *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72.

[204] *Ibid.*, p. 250.

[205] *Ibid.*, p. 309.

[206] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

> Kisans were [to be] kept in readiness to agitate against the zamindars when the movement started.... Students should receive assistance to enable them to visit factories so that strikes may be organized both there and in the colleges and schools.... Congressmen should be accompanied throughout by non-Congress agents so that the latter may have recourse to violence where necessary.

It was also laid down that none should try to escape being arrested, but when advance information was available they could go underground and continue to encourage defiance of the law.[207]

Leaders would hold public meetings as well as secret talks with close associates.[208] Nehru was supposed to have held several private meetings in Allahabad.[209] On 29 July Balkrishna Sharma addressed a meeting of 2,000 at Kanpur.[210] At an Agra meeting on 31 July 1942 the complications involved in removing railway tracks was discussed. To prevent loss of life it was decided that red flags should be put up where tracks were removed.[211]

The PCC had formed an emergency committee of five—Jawaharlal Nehru, G.B. Pant, Dr Sampurnanand, Rammanohar Lohia and Mohanlal Saksena were the members.[212] And the province was divided into five or six zones: Benares, Kanpur, Lucknow, Meerut, Allahabad and possibly, Hardwar, with the headquarters being at Allahabad.[213]

In the light of all this it would be wrong to assume that the UP was unprepared for a movement or that what occurred after 8 August 1947 was wholly spontaneous in character.

[207] *Ibid.*, pp. 245–46.
[208] Such as that of Acharya Kripalani in Benares. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
[209] *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 308.
[210] *Ibid.*, p. 250.
[211] *Ibid.*, p. 98.
[212] *Ibid.*, p. 251.
[213] *Ibid.*, pp. 302, 306.

Conclusion

During the years discussed in this work, certain subtle but vital changes took place in the power equation in India. The fibre of British authority was eroded by the Congress ministries—"not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially". The Congress ministries had shown themselves capable, not just of functioning, but in certain respects of acquitting themselves quite honourably. Moreover, participation in the provincial autonomy experiment had made the Congress more popular and, for the ordinary Indian, association with this national organization became almost a compulsion.

For the steel frame of British rule in India, that is, the bureaucracy the experiment of provincial autonomy had been an extremely difficult one. Congressmen, whom they had been used to treating as law-breakers and agents of sedition, had suddenly become their masters. The period of Congress in office gave many Indian bureaucrats their first glimpse of an alternative future. Their growing pro-nationalist sympathies caused much alarm to the Viceroy and his superiors.[1] The changed relationship between the Congress and the bureaucracy was also a source of much uneasiness to the British

[1] The Secretary of State, Lord Zetland, in a letter to the Viceroy on 29 November 1939, expressed concern at the tendency of some Indian officials to turn pro-Congress in the execution of the Congress ministry's policies. *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/8, p. 140.

It may be recalled that two years earlier the Viceroy had observed that "the success of the constitutional experiment on which we have embarked depends in a very large measure extent to which we can preserve the integrity of the public services, that is to say, secure their immunity from political influences or interference...." Linlithgow to Haig, 15 November, 1937, *Haig Papers*, Roll 2.

throughout the war period. Numerous were the occasions and varying the contexts in which the question: how willing would the officials be to take action against the Congress in the eventuality of a mass movement, was posed.[2]

The very fact that there was the continued possibility of a mass movement was the ultimate reminder to the British that the 1935 constitutional experiment had not succeeded in weakening the Congress or its commitment to a mass movement. Indeed, the episode of Congress in office had only widened the contradiction between imperialism and the nationalist forces.

The ministry period certainly had a profound effect on the lives of the Indian people. In October 1937, Jawaharlal Nehru observed that "the country is pulsating with a new life and a new vision".[3] For the peasantry and industrial labour these years meant a new forging of class identities and a new expression of confidence. Landlords and capitalists were compelled to realize that their vested interests would not always remain safeguarded. Students and the youth came into the forefront of political activity, at least in the UP. This enabled them to play a crucial role in the Quit India Movement.[4] Our study has shown how the students of the Benares Hindu University, in particular, had become adept at handling Congress affairs even earlier, that is, during the Individual Satyagraha campaign. As for the organization, ex-revolutionary terrorists began to play a prominent role in the UP Congress. The ministry years also seem to have facilitated a shifting of the focus eastwards—the Congress was becoming more popular in the backward

[2] *Home Poll*, 3/11/40, pp. 26–36, contains summaries of replies by Governors to questions such as "How far can Government servants be expected to go in dealing with the Congress, if likely to return to power?"

Hallett in his note on the Individual Satyagraha Movement dated 22 April 1941 observed that many government officials, especially those in the police, found it embarrassing to take action against ex-Congress ministers. *Linlithgow Papers*, F. 125/104.

[3] In a speech at the AICC session at Calcutta, 29 October 1937, *SWJN*, Vol. 8, pp. 388–89.

[4] For statistical evidence of the predominance of youth and men in their prime in the Quit India Movement, see Max Harcourt, "Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India: The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces" in D.A. Low, ed., *Congress and the Raj*, p. 322.

regions of eastern UP. This was revealed by the response to the Individual Satyagraha campaign.

On the other hand, ministerial politics did involve Congressmen in the somewhat unfortunate exercise of balance and counterpoise. Some interests had to be conciliated, so as to effectively oppose others. In the UP, it was the moneylender lobby which was conciliated so that the landlords' objections to the Tenancy Bill could be countered. This exercise resulted in an inability to honour some of the promises made in the Congress election manifesto. Thus, debt legislation in the UP had to be sacrificed at the altar of tenancy legislation. Likewise, budgetary constraints prevented certain cherished Congress ideals, such as that of prohibition, from being carried through.

There were other ministerial programmes which had consequences far removed from the intentions of the Congress. One such was the literacy programme, certain nuances of which were picked up by the Muslim League to fan the communal fire. Indeed, the increased communalization of politics in the province, which took place during the tenure of the ministry, was the one singularly unfortunate fallout. To some extent it was inevitable—the new power equation that had emerged with the Congress success in the 1936–37 elections gave rise to a greater sense of urgency in the camp of those who wanted to create a different power equation, that is, Jinnah and the Muslim League. But the Congress failure to mobilize the Muslims more effectively in this period, all efforts at Muslim mass contact notwithstanding, also remained significant. In Chapter 6 we have recorded the depressingly low figures for Muslim membership in several districts of the UP, at a point of time when the overall Congress membership figures were recording an unprecedented rise.

If we look at the ministry period carefully, two phases can be discerned—one from the beginning of provincial autonomy until September–October 1938 and the second from the latter date until the resignation of the ministries. In the former period, the Left attack on Gandhi and the constitutionalists was not very pronounced—nor did the Congress leadership feel compelled to curb the activities of the critics. Communal riots were also not very frequent in the province. In the latter phase (which begins roughly from the time of the Munich Agreement), Congress–Kisan Sabha relations were exacerbated; Subhas Bose was suddenly struck with the

notion that Gandhi had turned into a compromiser and would launch no further struggle against British imperialism and the Muslim League went on a strident anti-ministry campaign, resulting in a greater incidence of communal riots. The Congress High Command retaliated with a series of resolutions in the Working Committee and the AICC, which were intended to discipline the Congress by laying down stringent norms. It also tried to check the growing communal forces and to weed out the undesirable elements. It was also in this latter phase that the Congress ministries tended to become more conscious of the need to impose law and order as well. This brought a chorus of complaints from the Left camp about the repressive tendencies of the Congress Legislators.

The post-1934 period had also witnessed the emergence of several "alternatives" to Gandhism. What happened to these alternatives? Most of them remained at the level of rhetoric. Besides, the ad hocism of the groups responsible for these alternatives, namely the Royists, Subhashites, the Kisan Sabhaites and the Communists and their lack of a sophisticated understanding of the nature of British rule and the national movement in India cost them dearly. From November 1939 onwards, these critics of Gandhi were left floundering in a sea of uncertainty and wartime repression. The Congress Socialists were the only exception, as we have noticed in Chapter 4. As for the masses, they so clearly looked to Gandhi for guidance that Subhas Bose and his strategy of outright confrontation with the authorities could strike no responsive chord in the UP.

For Gandhi himself, the early years of the war were a hard struggle to devise an alternative role for the Indian people from that laid down by the British. If the Viceroy had declared India a belligerent country without even consulting the representatives of the Indian people, Gandhi in turn declared that India could never be a participant in a war which had resort to violence. But mere statements were not enough—how could the Indian people be actively mobilized and public opinion aroused against participation in the British war effort? The Mahatma's search for a new type of movement led him first to Individual Satyagraha and later to the no holds barred campaign of Quit India.[5]

[5] Bhupen Qanungo, "The Quit India Movement of 1942" in B.N. Pande, ed., *A Centenary History*, Vol. 3, pp. 562, 565.

The widespread response to Gandhi's Quit India call largely owed itself to the newly-acquired confidence of the Indian people in the 1937–39 period. Though not all parts of the UP participated in this movement, there is a rough correlation between the storm centres of 1942 and the areas of energetic mass activity during the tenure of the ministry. Ballia is a case in point—both in terms of the volunteer effort and Kisan Sabha activities, it had been in the forefront of popular activity during 1937–38. Azamgarh had also witnessed a strong agrarian movement and Youth League activity. Even Kanpur, despite the strong Communist influence, witnessed a goods train derailment and a serious riot in 1942. Other parts of the province provided tacit support for the movement by giving shelter to the Quit India activists, by disseminating information and by setting up underground bomb manufacturing centres.[6] There was no fear of British reprisals if the movement were to fail.

Finally we might add that if we were to look at the ministry phase of Congress activity, not merely to tabulate achievements and failures, but as part of the ongoing strategy of anti-imperialism, then something very significant emerges. For any people to have faith in a movement, it is necessary that they should believe that the movement is capable of a constructive role in the future. That expectation was fulfilled by the 28 months of Congress rule. No small wonder then, that when the activists of the Quit India Movement succeeded in displacing colonial power in certain pockets of the country, they did not try to "replace the infrastructure of the Raj with traditional models of authority" as in 1857 but rather, "Ruling in the name of Congress...[they] aimed at carrying out all the functions of the modern state and were structured into departments of 'justice', 'health', 'agriculture', 'education', 'propaganda', 'war', etc."[7] Obviously the memories of Congress in office were still fresh in their minds!

[6] Many Congressmen we interviewed in Rae Bareli, Lucknow and Unnao gave details of the supportive role that they had played in the Quit India Movement. Aligarh provided infrastructural support for the 1942 activists. It was a bomb manufacturing centre, which deliberately chose to stay away from overt acts of defiance which would draw attention to the underground activities. See *UP CID* File RR No. 26, relating to the Aligarh Bomb Case.

[7] Max Harcourt, "Kisan Populism and Revolution in Rural India: The 1942 Disturbances in Bihar and East United Provinces" in D.A. Low, ed., *Congress and the Raj*, Delhi, p. 321.

Glossary

bedakhli	ejectment order
begar	unpaid labour
bhaiyachara	co-parcenary estate
bigha	unit of land measurement, five-eighth of an acre
chamar	a caste: traditionally of leather workers but also engaged in agricultural and other forms of labour
chavni	a camp; also a cantonment
hartal	strike
karinda	landlord's agent
khudkasht	self-cultivated land or land cultivated with hired labour by landlord
lathi	wooden cane
mandal	a circle, a unit of District Board administration
mandi	market
maund	a unit of weight equal to 82 lbs
mehtar	a sweeper
mohalla	a ward
nazrana	payment in addition to rent
pargana	a sub-division of a tahsil
pattidari	proprietary lease
prabhat pheri	morning procession of singers
sanad	a grant or charter
sir	landlord's personal land
tahsil	a sub-division of a district
taluqdar	proprietor of a taluqa in Oudh
thakur	a Rajput landlord
thana	police station

thelawala	hand-cart pusher
tonga	horse-cart
tongawala	horse-cart driver
zamindar	landholder, landlord
ziladar	district revenue officer

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